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IT WAS
ALL A
DREAM

STEPHON
MARBURY

TIM
HARDAWAY

PAUL
PIERCE

QYNTEL
WOODS

BOB
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THE
DECISION

THE
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IN THE PAINT

SLAM no. 190 | AUGUST 2015

ROSTER

36. Last Call

It's not all the way finished yet, but the era of **Kobe Bryant** is certainly reaching its conclusion.

42. The Rivalry

Long before Kobe and Pierce, the likes of Magic and Bird made the **Lakers-Celtics Rivalry** the fiercest in the NBA.

44. Out of the Woods

Qyntel Woods disappeared from the NBA landscape almost as quickly as he'd entered it, but that doesn't mean he was done getting paid to play.

50. Come Home with Me

It's hard to fathom how far—both literally and figuratively—Chinese hero **Stephon Marbury** has come since his days as a Coney Island-residing SLAM Diarist.

54. The Road Less Traveled

West Virginia-bred **Jason Williams'** unique path to the NBA made him that much more of a fan favorite.

58. Keep the Crossover

Slick-handling **Tim Hardaway** had the skills to pay the bills.

62. Rising Sun

It doesn't take too much imagination to picture a feature on Class of 2017 high school star **DeAndre Ayton** appearing in SLAM 390, too.

PG. 54

Flashy and fly, Jason Williams was a revelation during the '99 season.



Norm Perdue/NBAE via Getty Images



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IN THE PAINT

SLAM NO. 190 | AUGUST 2015



FRONTCOURT

12. Trash Talk

We really weren't trying to link Andrew Wiggins with Michael Jordan, but that didn't stop y'all from doing so.

15. Hype

Rick throws it back to his hero, the Cooz, while Drew Gooden somehow stays in the news, and we ask what might have happened if Cam'ron paid his dues? Plus In Your Faces on the WNBA's Danielle Adams and about-to-be NBA draftees Kristaps Porzingis and Kevon Looney.

32. Kicks On Court

Can you say "color coordinated?"

34. Slamadamonth

When Iggy played (Dwight Howard like a) guitar.

BACKCOURT

68. The Fan

This time, we mean it!

70. Kicks Off Court

The perfect retro shoes for the Throwback Issue.

71. Kicks Extra

When the Rockets played the Knicks and shoe brands were as plentiful on the court as John Starks' bricks.

72. Punks

Get to know Hal Pastner and his Big Foot Hoops program, then read up on 2015 stars Thomas Bryant, Asia Durr, Tacko Fall, Marcus LoVett and Allonzo Trier.

81. Frozen Moment

Everyone's favorite Instagram account.

PG. 76

Sweet-skilled lead guard Asia Durr is more than ready for her next challenge.



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THE SIXTH MAN

The SLAM ad guys and I were in a meeting with some pretty powerful folks (powerful in the basketball-business sense, at least) recently, and at one point, one of the attendees said to us, "SLAM really is the perfect mix of nostalgia and the present."

Which, honestly, could not have made me prouder, even if he could have mentioned one other timeframe. You want nostalgia? Well, we've still got a *print publication* for starters! One that kids still buy so that they can decorate their rooms with the amazing images inside. What's more, each regular issue of SLAM includes an "Old School" story about a past great of the game, and for the second year in a row we're doing this Throwback Issue, featuring guys who have been on the cover of SLAM in the past (in Kobe's case, *lots* of SLAM covers).

You want present? This magazine—which in a typical issue has stories on the best current players in the NBA, WNBA, college and high school—is but one part of all the ways we bring you the game you love these days. SLAMonline.com has become a 24-7 operation (hopefully you noticed during the postseason) with great content tailored to web consumption (the LeBron James Vine piece, the Mike Scott emoji interview, etc), our social channels are booming (thanks to all of you who helped us surpass 300,000 followers on Instagram and 2 million in Facebook likes!) and now our younger editors are going Snapchat-mad, so I'm sure we'll rock that, too.

I guess the only descriptor the aforementioned business exec didn't mention is that SLAM represents the future, too. The future of sports media, in the diverse, modern way we cover a game that is treated too dryly by too many people, and the future of the game itself. Like the kid you see below Kobe here. That's DeAndre Ayton, considered the top player in the high school Class of 2017, whose compelling, from-the-Bahamas-to-San-Diego story Assistant Editor Franklyn Calle skillfully tells in our second-annual "New School" feature (pg. 62). Or Malik Newman, one of the best players in the Class of 2015, who wraps up his stint as our latest high school diarist this month, having successfully followed in the path of guys like LeBron, Kevin Love, Tyreke Evans and Harrison Barnes. Best believe that when DeAndre and Malik graduate to the NBA present, we'll be right there with them.

Peace,



Ben Osborne



OFF THE BENCH Michael Harren

Our man Mike, who works at Quad/Graphics and makes sure all of our words, photos and design are perfectly in place before the magazine gets printed, is known for his endless dedication to making every magazine look as good as possible for readers. He has been a "pre-press guru" since 1983, and continues to thrive at it on a day-to-day basis. When Mike isn't with his family, he's ensuring that every picture in SLAM—and a host of other large consumer magazines he works with—is presented in top-notch fashion. Having been in the game 32 years, a decade longer than SLAM, the Throwback Issue seemed like the perfect time to acknowledge this behind-the-scenes hero.



2015 Vol.22 No.7

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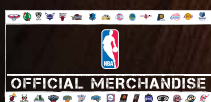
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FROM THE ROY TO THE GOAT

Andrew Wiggins is the best leaper since LeBron and Jordan. If he stays healthy, he's going to be a legend.

John Quincy Astor // via Facebook

I feel like Wiggins will be the closest player in comparison to Jordan when his career is done.
BRYANT HUSTED // VIA FACEBOOK

The only eye-catching thing on that entire cover is the name Michael Jordan.
IVANO IVANO // VIA FACEBOOK

Thank you for the article Rick Telander did on Michael Jordan playing with injuries. I like the older players, many of them played hurt. We can't get used to these cry baby players, and that includes LeBron James. He will never be M.J. Me and my granddaughter are die-hard Bulls fans. I love SLAM. Thanks again.
BRENDA FORD // BLOOMINGTON, IN
You're welcome?—Ed.

TRIPPIN'

What's up SLAMerica? I'm currently a 2-year subscription holder but a long-time fan. I am locked up at the moment and will be home in at least 8 months. I want to thank y'all for keeping me in the loop especially being in and out the box. I loved the "Charlamagne Tha God" interview. He hasn't changed one bit. I loved the

James Harden cover but let's go Steph Curry in the Finals! Hope to have my daughter or son in your magazine one day. Signing off as Bed-Stuy's Finest...
#RIPAnthonyMason.
NYKORI ANDREWS // ROMULUS, NY
P.S. Looking forward to seeing my letter in SLAM. That will be a special SLAM to show my kids.

Man, Steph and LeBron are killing it. Clippers just shocked me, though. Doc is going to let them choke a 19-point lead to close out the series? As for the teams on the outside looking in, I'm really impressed how Detroit handled so many swirling situations this season. First, the 5-23 record, then letting Josh Smith go, then going on a seven-game win streak and nearly snapping the one Atlanta started. Losing Brandon Jennings and adjusting to Reggie Jackson was too much, though. You all better watch out next year. As a side note, please do an article on Ohio State's toughness. Conley, Sullinger, Craft, Turner and Greg Oden (would've been a 20-8-2 player), and the up and coming future

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**INSTAGRAM
OF THE MONTH**
@fab_123

Happy G day to one of my all time favorite ball players #Al #AllenIverson #TheAnswer #PointGod #LittleBig-Man #Philadelphia76ERS #Philadelphia #Illadelphia #NBA #LivingLegend #Icon #HappyBirthday #Salute



star scorer D'Angelo Russell. I would die for one of these guys to be on a poster.

RYAN STUART // WATERFORD, MI

I'd die if Aaron Craft was ever on a poster, too. Because some of our readers would kill me.—Ed.

My name is Ronald Dosson, I'm 25 and an aspiring shoe designer. I always had a knack for setting intricate trends in school. I can reminisce on thinking on a way to perpetuate Denim, polyester, and Khaki made pants. From keeping them from dragging on the floor and unthreading. Thus, making holes in them I would tie them under the loops to my shoelaces, which gave the set of pants a baggier saggy look. That's what the epidemic was all about; lacing them up. I've watched the Miami Heat's '05-06 season when I was in 10th grade all the way up to the epilogue. I am a hardcore Dwayne [sic] Wade fan. Not only because of the way he plays but how he supports communities in Miami and Chicago against gun violence and police brutality,

which I've seen happen to me and others. Breaking barrier after barrier coming from a past of Jade that seems to follow me. The word has a way of keeping systems that fall in and fall out in a struggle to overcome something, like for instance a police officer putting some unknown substance in your hand or being late to register to receive college grants because of problems in economics, are a couple examples. I became a positive example for those who have been through what I have been through. I can't think of anything else now but for the staff at SLAM to advise me on I can join Wade on the "W.O.W. Team".

RONALD DOSSON // MIAMI

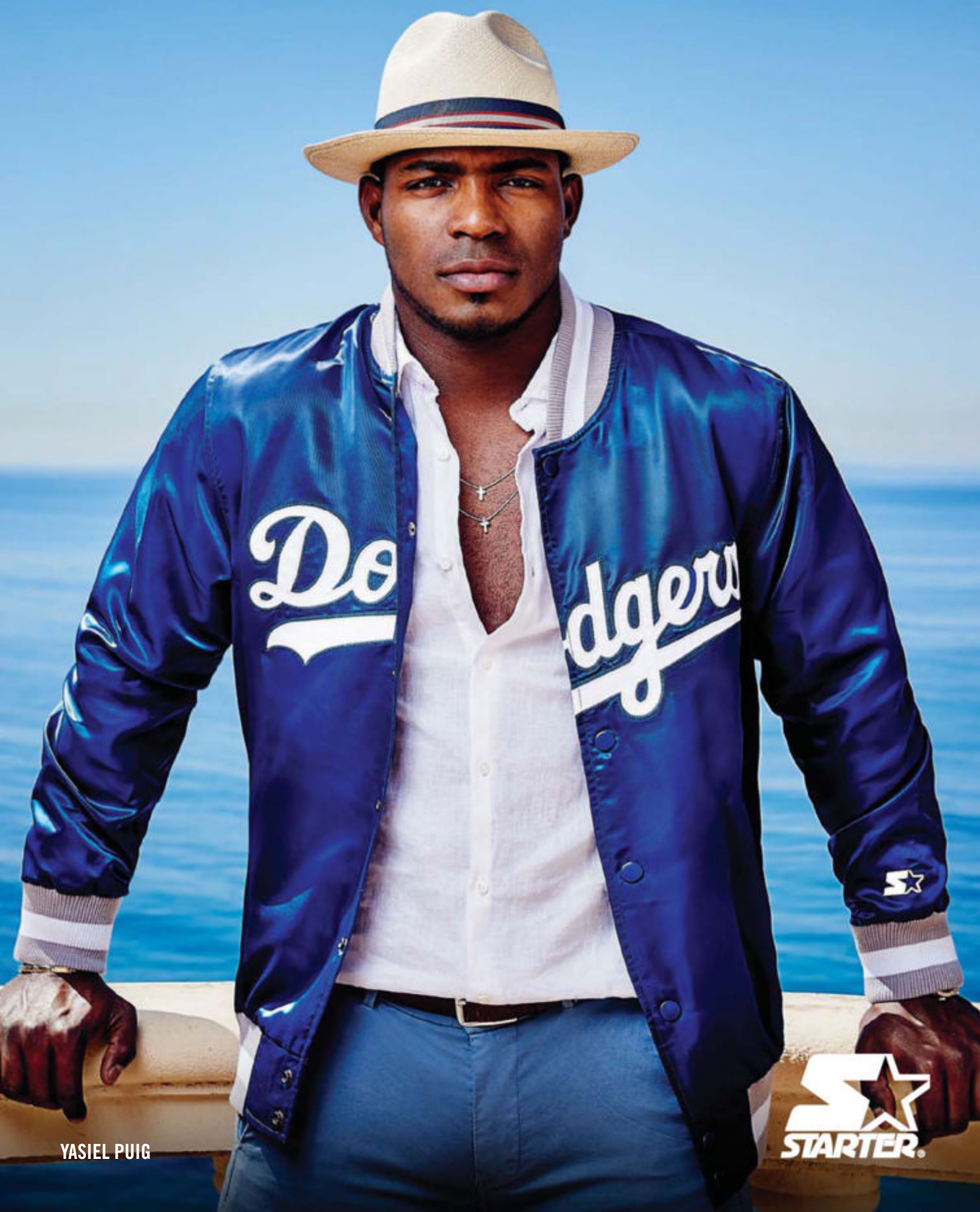
As we've tried to explain on the phone, we don't work with Li-Ning. Good luck though...—Ed.

Put Clippers (C) "DeAndre Jordan" on the cover. I think he's good enough to be on the cover. Thanks for reading and considering my letter.

LS MILLER // CA

What? Bro, what are you talking about, man? Bro, I'm out, man.—Ed.

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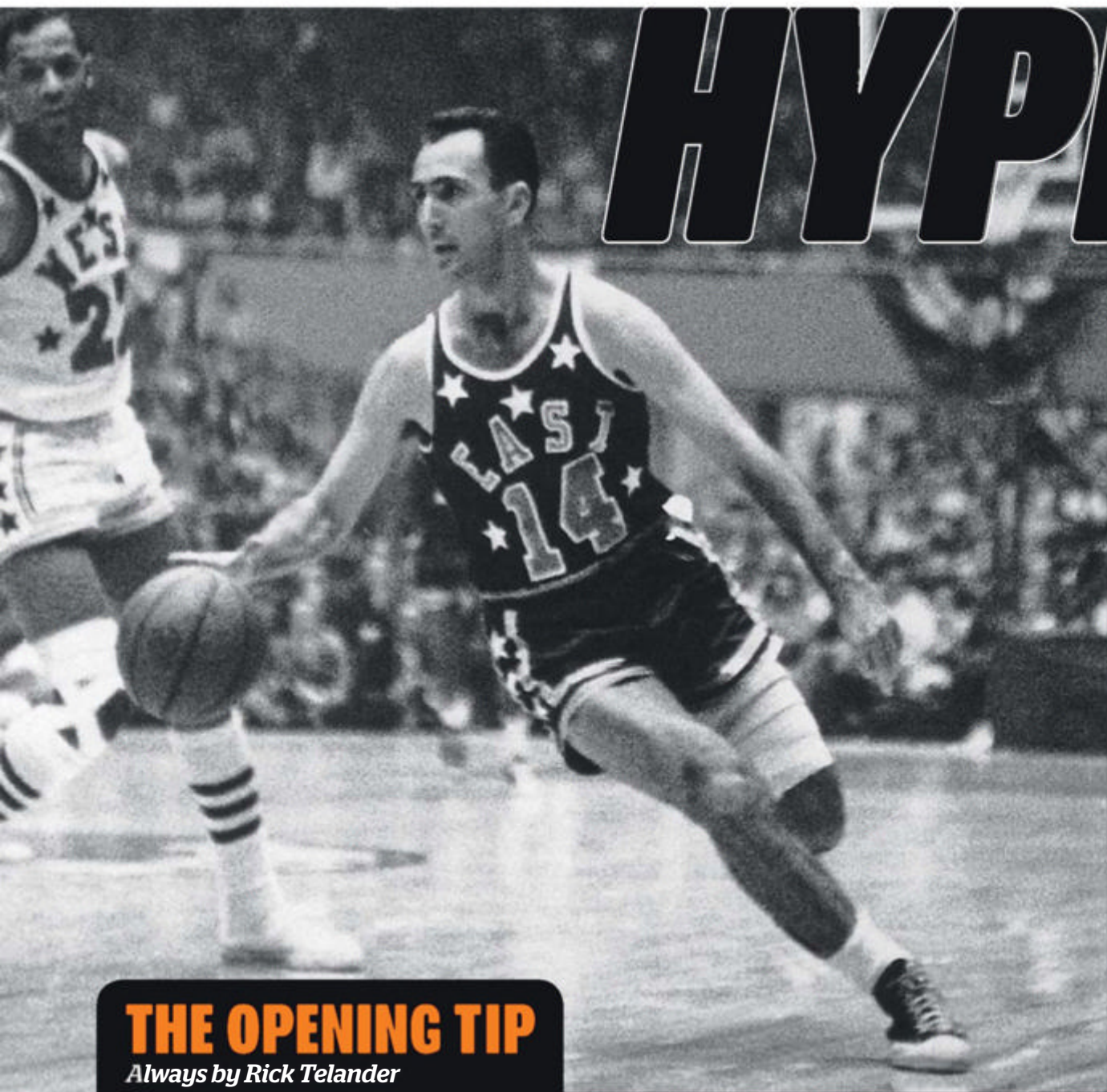


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HYPE



THE OPENING TIP

Always by Rick Telander

We're going way back here, kids, to a time even before—if you can imagine it—baggy trunks! Yes, this was the late-1950s, back when basketball players wore—without complaint—jockstraps, tight shorts and canvas Chucks, and this scribe was a little boy growing up in Peoria, IL, washing his rubber Voigt basketball in the kitchen sink so it would remain tacky and bright as a tangerine.

The Boston Celtics were the kings of the day, and a normal-sized player, Bob Cousy, was

their chief. The Cooz brought the ball up the floor, took running hook-shot bankers and dished the ball like a magician. He dribbled behind his back when nobody else did it, and he had a curiously erect posture that made you think he had a crowbar jammed up his butt. But that posture and the straight up-and-down dribbling were simply part of Cooz's magnificent floor game and the fact refs called palming back in the day.

Nobody could catch him,

and folks thought he was a hot dog with the way he led breaks and dribbled out clocks. "Really, they're moves you see 12-year-old kids doing on the playground today, and some of those kids are smoother than I was as a pro," he said in Terry Pluto's *Tall Tales: The Glory Years of the NBA*.

But here was the problem: I hardly ever saw the Cooz (how I loved that name!) do anything. The Celtics weren't on TV much in the Midwest, and the six-time NBA Champion and 13-time All-

Star lived in a world without a lot of in-depth reporting or anything resembling social media. Cooz had chest hair! He was balding! He couldn't pronounce his Rs and said in a Roman Meal Bread television ad I loved: "Woman Meal Bwed—that's my bwed!"

If only there was SLAM, and Cousy had been featured. Month after month. My heart falters. It would have been more amazing than seeing him hawk Kent cigarettes, which he did. Dream on, young hooper, dream on.

IN YOUR FACE

REMEMBER MY NAME

KRISTAPS PORZINGIS

Latvia, 7-1, F

Of the three international players likely to be selected in the top 10 of the 2015 NBA Draft—Emmanuel Mudiay (Congo/China), Mario Hezonja (Croatia) and Kristaps Porzingis (Latvia)—it says here that the 7-1, Porzingis has the most upside.

Porzingis caught my attention while I was scouting the 2013 U18 European Championships, where he was the leading shot-blocker (4.9 per) while averaging 11.6 ppg and 10.0 rpg. He's been playing in Spain since 2011, coming up with the Sevilla club team. In 49 combined Spanish league and Euro-cup games this season as SLAM went to press, he's averaging 11.0 points and 4.6 rebounds while shooting 36 percent from long distance.

Having initially declared for the 2014 NBA Draft, he withdrew to spend another year in Spain to increase his core strength. "I was getting pushed out of position inside," Porzingis says via Skype. "I realized I needed to improve my strength to achieve my dream of a successful NBA career."

Porzingis had also been prone to rely on his outside shot. With his added strength this year, he's been working better without the ball and flashing to the basket for dunks. His strength will continue to be an issue moving forward, but any marginal improvement will help him down the line.

The closest comparison in this year's Draft to Porzingis is Karl-Anthony Towns, another versatile 7-footer who can run the court and score both inside and out. Porzingis is a little behind Towns in the strength department, but otherwise their games appear similar. You don't see many 7-footers with a skill set like that. Porzingis headed to the USA in early June to train at Impact Academy in Las Vegas before heading to New York City for the Draft. While Towns may very well hear his name called first, Porzingis will likely head to the podium soon after—and provide one lucky team with a hell of a young player.—CARL BERMAN



Baloncesto Sevilla

NOYZ

Little known fact: Stephon Marbury and Keith Van Horn, with the story written by Russ Bengtson, were supposed to be a split cover with J-Will and C-Webb on SLAM 40. But the former stunk as teammates :(...Its name notwithstanding, The Undeafed sure has taken a lot of Ls.....Oh, to work for a media outlet that can spend much more money than it makes.....How much you wanna bet the Astros are Sam Hinkie's favorite team?.....Speaking of baseball, we wish that Chris Rock clip wasn't so true. Guess

VAGUELY LITERARY

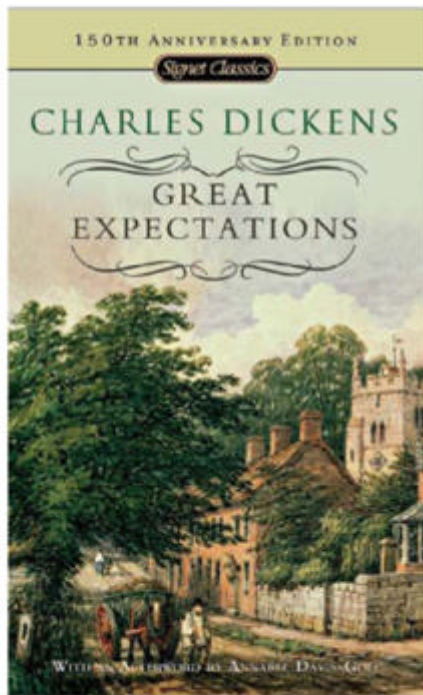
Anthony Davis, you are the next in line, the next great NBA megastar destined to win Championships, but you know this already. In fact, you can probably just get by on your talent and what you've done so far and be fine. Or, you can hold yourself to a higher standard, to still push to be greater, which is a message at the heart of the Charles Dickens classic, *Great Expectations*.

The title of the novel screams out what everyone wants from you. *Great Expectations* is the great coming of age story, written hundreds of years ago, often imitated to this day. It is the story of a boy named Pip and his rise. Over the course of his life, Pip encounters all types of people, from hardened criminals to refined ladies and gentlemen. In your young life, you've already done the same, growing up in Chicago while attending a charter school. Your life was

not much different from millions of other kids, and then things started to change, didn't they? As you grew physically, your basketball prominence rose, people started to treat you differently. Your good fortune with your well-documented growth spurt took your life to staggering heights that few can relate to.

Pip was a lucky boy, too, from a chance encounter to mysterious benefactors, he soon has people watching over him to make sure he succeeds, but who are they and why? The plot of the novel thrusts his life forward as he attempts to rise in social class and wealth. When the NBA season began, there was talk that you had already become the best player in the League. You have all the ability to make it real, though there are forces out there that will try and keep you from your destiny. Stephen Curry, James Harden, Russell Westbrook and Kevin Durant are all MVP types in the West who will battle you for much of your career. Pretty soon there will be talk about you leaving behind your NBA home of New Orleans for the big market that will claim you.

The lesson of Dickens' novel is to be true to who you are, and that the "great expectations" you may have for yourself shouldn't force you down that darker path of ambition. It's a long book with 59 chapters, but it's summertime. This is the last chance you'll have before the grind of the season takes you away, and off you go on the classic journey that Dickens created for you. —SAM RUBENSTEIN



DECISION MAKER

THARON MAYES, THE HEAD OF ATHLETICS AT THE BOYS & GIRLS CLUB OF NEW HAVEN WHERE LEBRON JAMES' FAMOUS ANNOUNCEMENT TOOK PLACE FIVE YEARS AGO, SPEAKS ON THE EFFECT LBJ HAS HAD WITHIN THE CITY.

As told to Dr. L.A. Gabay

I was hired a week before the announcement. Being from the area, I can tell you we don't often have global icons in our backyard. It's not an exaggeration to say that LeBron's coming here shifted the cultural paradigm within our community. With the monies from The Decision, the Greenwich Club renovated its gym, and [BGCNH] was able to create a much-needed computer center with new laptops and desktops.

Things that can seem basic for most are life-changing for those in need, especially children and families from underserved neighborhoods who need a safe place to be after school, healthy snacks, a gym for play and a quiet room to read, write and study.

LeBron James knows better than most that basketball extends in ways well beyond the court. It enabled me to get a college degree [at Florida State—Ed.], make a living playing in the NBA [with the 76ers and Clippers—Ed.] and nine years professionally in Europe, Asia and South America. Building upon those experiences has provided me a platform to reach young people through sports and education. When our AAU team practices or travels to games, we spend hours talking about books, ideas and building trust with others and in ourselves. Ninety percent of our students are now getting As and Bs back at their schools.

When I was in the League, we had players who were community-driven—George McCloud is one name that comes to mind—but LeBron's level of recognition and societal significance is massive. James is doing some amazing things in the sport. He is the best player in the League, and to win Championships and achieve all that he has is awesome and hard to do. But what he accomplished here, culturally for our kids in New Haven, is even harder to do and really an important part of his growing legacy.

Line of the Month

BY SHANNON BOOHER

LYRICS OF THE MONTH: "Put the Hawk in your chest and Millsap you dudes," "Quiet Storm Freestyle"; "And give me mine, you don't want to see my stress look/I drive through with the mask, lookin' like Westbrook," "Shook One Freestyle"; "So when I talk Clippers, know that I can Doc Riv it/Big man, pace yourself like Roy Hibbert," "Been Around The World Freestyle." That is just the tip of the iceberg. Fabulous' Friday Night Freestyles is littered with NBA-inspired gems over classic '90s hip-hop beats. **LOTS OF LOVE LOST OF THE MONTH:** "There's no Love in the game, that's how the Cavs feel," Fabulous; "LeBron-inspired, musta thought I needed Love to win," Joe Budden. Lately, when Kevin Love leaves a team, the situation seems to just get better. After injuring his shoulder, the Cavs kept rolling without him, while the T-Wolves can claim this year's Rookie Of The Year and next year's No. 1 overall pick. Then Fab and Joe went and threw a little extra salt in the wound on "Affirmative Action Freestyle." Ouch.



it helps the NBA, though. One thing that does not help: the fact that Billy Hamilton's agent is a complete moron.....Coach Cal going back to the NBA is obviously gonna happen—it's just a question of when.....Jalen/Chris: Let's go!!!!.....Not to harp on sneaker company's IG accounts, but are they using Google Translate to write their captions?.....Let's get this concussion business sorted out, NBA.....We always knew Ernie Johnson was cool. Hearing that he travels with SLAM and reads every issue just made that abundantly clear.....LeBronJamesLeBronJamesLeBronJamesLeBronJamesLeBron James Ja.....

TRUE TO THE GAME

Get It In Ohio

Blazers guard **CJ McCollum's** love of hoops began in the Buckeye State—and hasn't faded away one bit.

CJ McCollum came into his own this past season, finding his footing as a second-year member of the Portland Trail Blazers and developing into a solid role player on a contending team in a tough Western Conference. But the process to become that player—and, potentially, a much better one—didn't begin last summer, or even the summer before that; it originated, in all likelihood, during his first few months on this planet, with a toy ball and a plastic hoop in a small baby crib. We spoke with the Canton, OH, native about his life-long hoops obsession.

SLAM: How'd you initially fall in love with the game of basketball?

C: My mom and my dad played in leagues when I was really young, so I remember watching them play. My dad was a big [Michael] Jordan fan—he loved Jordan and would always watch Mike. And I used to sleep with a ball in my crib, so it was just always a part of my lifestyle. Then my brother played, so I followed his footsteps. The game's been good to me ever since.

SLAM: Do you remember the earliest courts you ever played on?

CJ: We used to shoot the socks in the hamper and all that stuff. We had a hoop on the door, so my brother and I used to play one-on-one on our knees, you know, all that stuff that kids do. And we always played outside. I actually had a court, and we used to play on the court outside, lowering the hoop to get some dunks in and then raise it back up and go to work.

SLAM: Did the sport come naturally to you?

C: It was something I had to work on, but I always had talent—I just couldn't shoot. I could get to the hole, all right hand, because I hated using my left hand. I used to always miss

left-handed layups. I couldn't really shoot until the end of the eighth grade—that's when my jump shot started to get good.

SLAM: Is there anyone who pushed you from being an average kid who liked basketball to what you became as a high school player?

CJ: My brother, definitely. Without him I wouldn't be where I'm at. He was and still is my best friend. We work out together when I'm home and I talk to him constantly, even when he's in Europe [*where CJ's big bro plays professionally—Ed.*]. My mom raised us to be best friends and to push each other. I remember there was a time when he hated me being around because he's two and half years older, and my mom used to make him put me on his team. It started where it wouldn't count when I got the ball—they were just empty possessions—then when I started getting better he wanted me to be on his team and to come play with him. It's funny how it's come full circle.

SLAM: When did you realize that you could hold your own on the court?

CJ: I think when I got to high school I continued to get better—my brother graduated after my freshman year—and my sophomore year I was finally by myself, just me and Kouf [*Kosta Koufos, who also attended GlenOak High School in Canton.*—Ed.]. I was more of a role player, not dominating yet. Once Kouf left and it was just me, I think my first game of my junior year, I had like 54 points in my first career start and I was like, OK. I'm ready now.

SLAM: Do you remember the first basketball you owned?

CJ: My mom probably bought me my first ball. I'm sure my dad put one in my crib as a little toddler, but my first real



basketball, my mom probably bought it. It's funny, I used to sleep with the ball until I realized how dirty it was. I was like, I can't be doing this. I can't be putting this ball in my bed anymore. —**ADAM FIGMAN**

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NOYZ

*SLAMonline's story on Matthew Dellavedova shopping for organic groceries>>>>>>>SI's story on same.....Speaking of Delly—for those of you who are (*shudders*) too young to remember Linsanity, this is your comp...Yo.Stoney! When are we getting the made-for-TV Stephen Curry and Jordan Spieth golf outing?>>>>>>>Still not believers in the Rockets. Sorrrry....The subject of the sports writer/editor Story of the Century is a little too sensitive for us to really get into, but we will say that the time to quote Uncle Wes was 15 years ago, now.*

CRAZY HOPS


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HYPE



SEE YOU AGAIN

Classic jacket brand **STARTER** has returned with a bang.

It's a bitter cold February night in NYC and Jadakiss is staying warm in the Paramount Hotel in Times Square at a party hosted by Starter to celebrate Super Bowl XLVIII.

Most of the festivities are taking place in a back room, with girls and alcohol and everything else you'd expect to find at one of these events. But the Yonkers-born rapper has no interest in any of that at the moment. All he can focus on are the brightly colored satin jackets lining the racks in front of him.

Jada eventually lands on one of the loudest versions, a simultaneously ugly and beautiful Charlotte Hornets purple jacket.

"He was more interested in the coats than partying," says Alexander Cole, Sports Marketing Manager of Iconix Brand Management, the company that now owns Starter. "He ended up wearing that jacket in The Lox's next video."

This is exactly what Iconix and Cole envisioned back in 2013 when they decided to create Starter

Black Label and bring back the beloved jackets and snapbacks with Starter's signature products acting as the conduit. After all, this was how it was back in the late '80s and early '90s, when you couldn't go more than a couple of hours without seeing Starter on your TV.

Luther Campbell and 2 Live Crew had green Miami Hurricanes coats. Chuck D had the black Oakland Raiders. Eddie Murphy wore a blue Mets jacket to fit in to Queens in *Coming to America*. Joe

Montana donned a gold version on a 1987 episode of *Saturday Night Live*. Even surly Mike Ditka, critic of hip-hop and backward hats, roamed the sidelines in a Bears jacket with stripes on the sleeves.

But financial hardships, mainly due to various league lockouts, forced the brand's original founder, David Beckerman, to sell the company in '99. After that, if you wanted a jacket, eBay or vintage shops were where you had to go.

Starter changed hands a

NOYZ

Jake's back.....What about a sitcom called "NOYZ in the Hood" featuring Tony Gervino, Russ Bengtson and a hooded sweatshirt? It would be like Two Guys, A Girl and A Pizza Place, except with a pizza stain on the hooded sweatshirt.....It's less bothersome watching Duke win the national title game when one of the Dukies was probably the first very tall and talented basketball player to ever call you "Mr." That same guy who was in Time Out last issue.....In Spain, the manager is known as the Mister (pronounced

Tom Medvedich



couple of times before ending up in Iconix' portfolio in '09. The original plan was to license the brand to Walmart, who would make and sell clothes, then send Starter a check. But in 2012, Cole and the rest of Iconix decided they could do more.

"We love the nostalgia," he says. "We realized you couldn't really talk about Starter without bringing up the jackets or hats. That's the stuff that Starter was always known for."

And so, in 2012, Starter Black Label was created. Walmart could

keep selling its products, but Starter would also produce the clothes fans most wanted to see.

With the help of former NY Giant Carl Banks, licenses for nearly every pro sports team and 150 NCAA schools were secured. The Korean factory that made the jackets 30 years ago was recommissioned.

The rest is history. Jadakiss was one of many celebs dying to get their hands on a Starter jacket. Back in 2013, when he was scheduled to shoot his Taco Bell

commercial, Kevin Love pulled a Timberwolves jacket out of his closet. No request had been made for him to do so and no money changed hands. This was a decision he made on his own. Only after filming did Love reach out to Starter about working together.

"It's great to see the jackets making a comeback," Love says. It turns out, he wasn't the only athlete interested in repping something from his childhood.

"The jackets were a big part

of my life," says New York Jet Eric Decker. "I had a Hornets one I wore all the time. It's exciting to work with the brand and contribute to its comeback."

Now Starter gear can be seen everywhere. Drake has his purple Raptors joint, Snoop's got his Lakers, and Starter hats are all over the streets. Soon, everyone will be trying to get their hands on one of those satin coats. And, for the first time in a minute, they'll be easy to find. —YARON WEITZMAN

Meester).....LeBron's windmill dunks are so nice to watch. Other windmills that are nice to look at are often found in The Netherlands or on miniature golf courses.....Rooting for a good game is really fun sometimes. Or most of the times.....Player Efficiency Rating (PER) is just REP spelled backward. Tell a friend.....If not for Gentlemen's Quarterly, SLAM might be running a special summer fashion issue based on the style of sidelined stars.....Isiah Thomas tabbed to run the New York Liberty? The only crazier thing that could come out of the Garden would be an Andrea Bargnani highlight mix. What?.....

IN YOUR FACE

TUNE UP

KEVON LOONEY
UCLA, 6-9, F

Milwaukee might not be synonymous with basketball, but things are starting to change in Cream City. Not only are the young Bucks on the come up, but the best player to emerge from the city since Devin Harris over a decade ago is preparing to make his NBA debut. His name is Kevon Looney, most recently of UCLA, where he earned second-team All-Pac-12 honors last season while grabbing the most boards in a season by a Bruin since Kevin Love, roamed the hardwood at Pauley Pavilion.

Yet, despite his successful freshman campaign, the decision to turn pro didn't come easy for the 6-9 forward. "It was a very difficult decision to leave after one season because I loved the college experience and the alignment with UCLA," Looney says. "It wasn't my plan coming out of high school, just a decision my family and I made together."

Looney's combination of length (7-3.5 wingspan!) and hustle make him a superb rebounder (9.2 rpg last season) and helps explain why he's being projected as a mid-first round pick in this year's Draft. And his ability to hit long range shots (22-53 from three-point land at UCLA) projects him to be a nice stretch 4, which are all the rage in today's NBA. "I see myself making an impact with an NBA team right away," he says confidently.

"I'll bring versatility, energy, production and will embrace whatever the team needs from me. My game is improving every day. I'm working extremely hard on rebounding, shooting, everything."

He'll need to be improving on the daily if his dream NBA scenario is to play out in real life. "I hope to have a similar career to Kevin Garnett or Kevin Durant," Looney says. "Both are great players and contribute so much to their franchises."

If Looney's vision comes to fruition, we can safely say that the cream of Cream City rose to the top. —**JEFF FOX**



NOYZ

Man, eff the Bulls front office for the post-Thibs press release. What the hell did that snarky shit accomplish?.....Much respect to our man Skyzoo, whose album *Music For My Friends* drops June 23. Go get that!....."via Skype" lol.....The Cavs' recent in-arena entertainment appears to have been hired with some of Quicken Loans' "money".....If y'all are not messing with the #ReallyOutHereBoyz by now, you're doing it wrong.....Have you ever seen a basketball mag that looked like it was inspired by

Basketball Ties

Cam'ron used music to become an international superstar—but his pre-rap high school hoops career was no joke, either.

Cameron Giles, once one of the best prep players in New York City, is showered with love as he walks through Rucker Park on a hot day last summer. When former hoops stars return to the courts for events like this—a Reebok-sponsored HS all-star game featuring some of the best young talent in the city—they're generally embraced warmly, with daps and hugs thrown in their direction by everyone from local legends to up-and-comers with a good sense of history.

Yet when Giles saunters through the park, it's not just a select few who show respect—everyone loses their shit. That's because this Harlem native isn't merely a former hoops prodigy; Giles is now known as Cam'ron, a platinum rapper with a bevy of hit singles. Despite his rap success, Cam's earliest goals were your standard hoop dreams. He grew up balling around 140th Street and Lenox Ave (where

Nicky Barnes got rich as fuck) and attended Manhattan Center for Science and Mathematics. "Rafer [Alston], Steph [Marbury]—I busted they ass," he remembers. "They had hype, that's why I took pleasure in killing them."

Giles famously played on the same HS team as Mason Betha—later known as Ma\$e—and in '92, the two, along with Richie Parker (who lost high-major scholarship offers because of a sexual assault charge), brought the team all the way to the PSAL Class A championship at Madison Square Garden, defeating Marbury's Lincoln squad to get there. But Cam bricked a running three at the buzzer that would've given his team the victory, and Manhattan Center fell 55-53.

In Cam'ron's semi-autobiographical flick *Killa Season*, that miss is portrayed as the shot that changed everything; after it rims out, Cam turns to drug dealing.



HUSTLE & FLOW

In reality, he kept hooping, both AAU and high school. As a senior, Cam and Parker achieved a perfect 25-0 regular season at Manhattan Center. "That team was dope," Cam recalls. "[But] our 2-guard had gotten hurt. We went 25-0 but lost in the first round. Devastating."

But was the 6-0 Cam really nice on the court? "He was a defender and he knew his role on the team,"

says legendary Queens-based scout Tom Konchalski, whose picture-perfect memory recalls Giles fondly. "He was a good basketball player—a typical inner-city, tough, gritty, focused guard."

Adds Alston, "You couldn't really stop him from going to the basket, and he was tough. He wouldn't back down from any competition." —ADAM FIGMAN

The Fader? Us neither.....Incidentally, hoop mags are dying left and right, huh? Not this one!.....Congrats to Ime Udoka! Talk about raising your game.....Why is NBA.com STILL so hard to use?.....The WNBA's lack of support of our Women's Hoops issue is absurd.....No, agent/family member/friend, you are NOT the first person to ask if your client/son/friend/cousin can be on our cover. EVERY basketball player wants to be on our cover. Keep grinding and if it's meant to happen, it will.....We wonder if Wizards assistant Don Newman is mad that someone else has the @mroctoer handle on Twitter.....

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DIME DROP

M DUB

Marketing pro and former TV personality **Mike McGuiness** could compete with our writer for title of Biggest Warriors Fan.

While Hollywood certainly knows Co-Op Agency co-founder Mike McGuiness from his work marketing and doing PR for celebrities, NBA fans and players know him for the moment that NBA on TNT cameras caught McGuiness going crazy after his Warriors eliminated the Nuggets in the first round of the 2013 NBA Playoffs. That image of a bearded McGuiness wearing a white straw hat and his lucky Sarunas Marciulionis warm-up has become so engrained in Warriors lore that their local broadcaster, CSN Bay Area, plays it as part of their pre-game promo commercial.

SLAM: When did you first become a Warriors fan?

MM: Since day one. I was always the uncoordinated tall white guy playing pick-up games around Oakland, and I was actually the ball boy at Cal for Jason Kidd's last year and two years of [Shareef] Abdur-Rahim. I wanted to be the ball boy so bad that in grade school I went down there every day and kept applying even though they weren't hiring until they finally said yes. From there I wanted to be the Warriors' ball boy when I was a

freshman in high school, but my parents wouldn't let me do it because it was too many games.

SLAM: You've been in L.A. for 15 years. How was it for a diehard living in Laker and Clipperland during the tough years?

MM: I hated the Lakers more than anything and until the Clippers came about that was all of my true hate. I now hate the Clippers way more than the Lakers. We Believe was awesome but it was short lived and they fucked it up. We draft [Chris] Webber, they fuck it up. They trade Mitch Richmond for Billy Owens. All that shit happened. Every time we've had a minute of good it just fell off a cliff. Once we actually got good and it seems sustainable it was unreal. It was also a trip too because I'm in L.A. where you see the craziest celebrity stuff happen all the time. It's my business, I see it often and I'm never really impressed. There is no feeling in the world like when Steph sees me at a game in my Warriors regalia and comes and gives me the fist bump.

SLAM: Is the current Golden State team your favorite Warriors squad of all time?

MM: By a mile. [Run-] TMC was



super fun and it was a different perspective because I was a kid. Not only [is this team] fun to watch but also Steph is the most fun to watch player ever. In my book, he's up there with the greats.

SLAM: Neither of us was alive when the Warriors last won the Championship in 1975, but do you think this team is the best Warriors team ever?

MM: They are definitely the most exciting. Rick Barry was a G, but Steph is the guy.

SLAM: Who was your guy growing up?

MM: I went to Camp Hardaway as a kid and I was so pumped that they gave me a scholarship

to come back the next weekend for free. There was a moment where we're taking this photo and I was so stoked to be next to Tim Hardaway that I had the biggest shit-eating grin of all time on my face, and he looked at me and he goes, 'You can't be smiling in the picture. I'd probably say Mitch Richmond, but that was so short-lived. I'd have to say Hardaway because of that whole connection.'

SLAM: In 2012, you and David Arquette had a show called Tripaholics on The Travel Channel. Do you have any plans to return to TV?

MM: Simon [Rex] and I pitched a show called Road Warriors. It was a travel show with me and Simon—who are fans of the worst team in the League—following around our favorite team and getting into trouble in every city. We had a production company interested and had a green light from them and then they got scared about dealing with the NBA for usage. Can you imagine if Dirt Nasty and I had a Warriors show the first time they were in the Championship in 40 years? It would just be on fire right now. So I'm super annoyed with that, but I have a couple travel things I'm working on. I definitely love the travel show game. —**BRANDEN J. PETERS**



Drew Gooden, Washington Wizards: Picture Drew Good Ol' Gooden ballin'...? We've pictured that for over 13 years now, since before the former Jayhawk went fourth overall in the 2002 Draft. The journeyman suited up for teams around the country, including (but not limited to) the Cavaliers, Bulls, Bucks, and most recently, the Wizards. But at 33 and with career averages of 11.3 points, 7.3 rebounds and 1.2 assists per, the Oakland native keeps on keepin' on, bringing his veteran status, size and modest stats to each arena he's called home. *Still ballin'.*

Alana Beard, Los Angeles Sparks: At 33 years old, Alana Beard has quite the résumé. She was the first Duke women's basketball player to have her jersey retired. She was the No. 2 pick in the 2004 Draft. She was a rookie who took the Mystics to the Playoffs. She was a four-time WNBA All-Star. She was a member of the All-Defensive Team five times. That was all in the past. What about now? From Shreveport to Los Angeles, with some pit stops and injury-ridden years in between, Beard is still hooping with the pros on a national stage. —**HABEEBA HUSAIN**



PICTURE ME BALLIN'

NOYZ

The only thing that's been deflated around here is our already shrinking interest in the stupid NFL.....That Jaylen Brown news came literally two hours late to make it into SLAM 189! While we're at it, it's time so say goodbye to some great high school kids whom we couldn't get in to PUNKS before they graduated: PJ Dozier from South Carolina, Charles Matthews from Chicago, Elijah Thomas from Texas, Moustapha Diagne from Jersey and King McClure from Texas. Do your thing in college, fellas, and we'll get to you then.....

CHOOSE YOUR WINGS.

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IN YOUR FACE

DON'T MESS

DANIELLE ADAMS

San Antonio Silver Stars, 6-1, F/C

On the subject of WNBA matchup nightmares, the usual names are Griner, Parker and Moore. Just don't forget Danielle Adams, San Antonio's do-everything sixth woman.

Adams boasts an inside-outside game that even those aforementioned stars envy. The 6-1 forward specializes in bullying opposing posts on the low block and sinking threes. "I take pride in my versatility," she says. "Whatever needs to be done, I'm going to do it."

Although Adams comes off the bench for just over 20 minutes a game, the ball is constantly in her hands (with a top-10 usage rate every season) and her efficiency never dips (19.5 PER on her career).

Adams flew onto the WNBA radar when she led Texas A&M to the National Championship in 2011, two years after transferring from Jefferson Community College in Missouri. She scored 30 in the title game, the second-highest total of all time.

A First-Team All-American and newly crowned Final Four MOP, Adams was still overlooked in the draft, falling into San Antonio's hands at the end of the second round.

"It was nothing new," Adams says. "Proving people wrong motivates me. I proved them wrong when they said I couldn't play DI. I'd do it again in the WNBA." That she did. Adams was named an All-Star her rookie season and has since carved out a rep as a walking mismatch.

Only an injury could derail the player affectionately known as the D-Train. Adams fractured her kneecap playing in France last December. She returned home to Kansas City to rehab, and as a restricted free agent, was courted by several teams. But by mid-March, the Stars and Adams agreed to a multi-year extension.

"Coach likes my versatility and what I bring to the team," says Adams, who is averaging 12 ppg and 5 rpg early this season. "He's never had a player like me." —RYNE NELSON

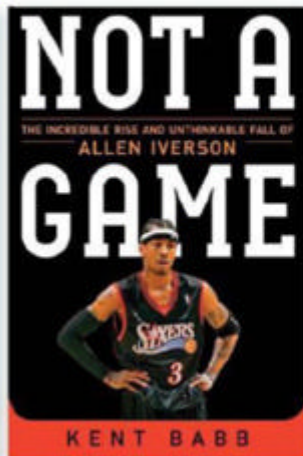
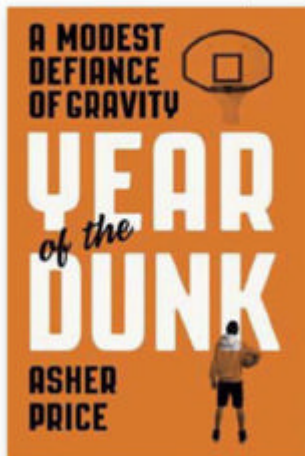


Gary Dineen/NBAE via Getty Images

NOYZ

Thanks and good luck to our man Dave Maharaj!!!!.....And Yohn Hall, too. Come back longer next summer after you ball out in college, Yohn!.....The '90s Rockets winning a Chip as a No. 6 seed was compelling and all, but there's no question about where they stand in the "NBA pantheon of great teams." They stand nowhere. The only question is why the movie about them would get made before so many more-interesting title winners.....Pretty wack that none of the people in the "media round-

UNDER REVIEW



BOOKS

Most players learn to throw down in their teens while their bodies are in the midst of a growth spurt—not the other way around. In *Year of the Dunk*, author and journalist Asher Price runs counterclockwise in a hundred-to-one attempt to defy the laws of gravity and finally prove that over-the-hill white men can dunk.

Price, an Austin native with roots in New York, was 6 when he witnessed Spud Webb's Dunk Contest heroics in 1986, but it took a few decades and a brush with mortality before attempting his first flight. He seemingly has an

advantage at 6-2 and a half with orangutan arms, but on his initial attempt he discovers his hands are too small and his vertical doesn't allow enough clearance to cuff the rock; the spring in his legs has receded like his hairline. Despite his lack of athleticism and strength, he gives himself a year to dunk and enlists the help of an Olympic Gold medal high-jumper and visits a lab that studies jumping insects in order to transform into a pogo stick. While

discovering the jumping secrets of the ninjas, Price's past as a cancer survivor emerges from the biology, physics and history of one of the greatest money shots in sports while debunking a fallacy mythologized by Mars Blackmon. *Year of the Dunk* is disarmingly self-deprecating and asks fundamental questions about human ability, the degree to which we can actually improve ourselves, and of course, how to improve your hops. —SHERMAN JOHNSON

It always seemed that Allen Iverson had an answer for every situation, but according to a

new book by Kent Babb, behind the scenes, he couldn't manage his private life. *Not A Game: The Incredible Rise and Unthinkable Fall Of Allen Iverson* delves into the life of the fallen star.

Babb implies that everybody in Philly was aware of AI's problems long before his infamous interview about practice. There were signs: red-rimmed eyes, a swollen face, slurred speech. He and his entourage were a fixture at restaurants and strip clubs, but after witnessing the murder of his brother from another mother in a drunken misunderstanding, he started inhaling cases of Corona until the sun came up and was often drunk when he made it to afternoon practice habitually late, if at all. The book reports that he rarely showed up for practice, dating back to high school when he started boozing. As a hyperactive kid with insomnia, he was already attempting to outrun demons. Lack of a father and irresponsibility of a cracked-out mother left Allen to care for his seizure-prone baby sister, which often conflicted with school. Basketball was not simply a game to Iverson; it was a way out after he was imprisoned for allegedly starting a brawl at a bowling alley. He was on his way to becoming a statistic when Georgetown coach John Thompson bailed him out of jail. The experience undoubtedly scarred him for life.

Not A Game should be on every athlete's reading list. It's a reminder of how keeping it real and rewarding friends and family even as they bleed you dry can go horribly wrong. —SJ

table" held before the Finals named SLAM as one of the most influential outlets in the game.....Kind of crazy that there haven't been more Jim Jones jokes over the years, a gap that was highlighted by the surprisingly effective play of the Cavs reserve in the Playoffs (h/t Peter Walsh).....The Kanye West bday game just shows how bad everyone wants to be a baller.....Our favorite Chris Gatling-getting-embarrassed moment when he was the victim of that insane dunk by Shawn Kemp that was called "the Gatling rattling." This latest news just sucks.....The Tom Crean Era at IU stays messy.....

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LOUDER THAN A BOMB Always by Dave Zirin

TRUTH SHALL SET US FREE

The old-school **Paul Pierce** might just be the guy to break Washington, DC, out of its basketball slump—if he doesn't retire or move to a different team first.

In honor of SLAM's Throwback Issue, a tip of my hat to the player who most looks like he was unfrozen after 40 years in a cryogenic chamber and put on a 2015 NBA court: Paul Pierce. His veal-like absence of muscle tone, his herky-jerky slow-motion moves, his mid-range shot and his smarts all make him look like he was plucked directly from an episode of NBA Hardwood Classics.

Before this season, I never appreciated the 37-year-old future Hall of Famer. The reason why is entirely rooted in my own provincial prejudices, as I am congenitally unable to enjoy anyone in Celtic green. This changed as Pierce, the ultimate NBA throwback, came to my now-hometown of Washington and looked for a fleeting moment in this year's Playoffs like the first player in a generation with the ability to throw this team forward. The ultimate 1970s-looking player appeared as if he could make the Wiz nationally relevant for the first time since Magic Johnson was in high school.

Before Atlanta jettisoned the Wizards in a manner still too cruel to contemplate, and Pierce was throwing in game winners with ease, he looked like he could be our Neo, the person with the ability to break what is known locally as the Curse O' Les Boulez (The Bullets). This is the point where I should explain that when it comes to sports, I absolutely believe in curses. This is, at heart, a question of mass psychology: the idea that a community can collectively



engage in an act of self-fulfilling prophecy. I also believe that there is nowhere in our society where curses take stronger root than in the world of sports. They are like a gray cloud with the capacity to envelope a team, a fan base and every player who comes into contact with it. The cloud might not be visible to the naked eye, but it can hover over franchises like a Swoosh-laden Dementor sucking the life out of an arena every time hope reveals its head. This has been the reality for the Wizards over the course of decades. This community has lived through John "Hot Plate" Williams, "Dinner Bell" Mel Turpin and drafting the tallest and shortest players in NBA history—Muggsy and Manute—as press stunts, only to get rid of both players before they became real NBA players.

This is the team that seemed to take glee in crushing hope under its heel, trading young C-Webb for old Mitch Richmond; young Rasheed for old Rod

Strickland; maxing out Gil Arenas after knee surgery and giving up the chance to draft Stephen Curry to trade their pick for Randy Foye (not that they would have drafted Curry; that's the curse). This team is so cursed that it had Michael Jordan on the premises and the gray cloud was stronger than his Airness, fastening him to the floor and sweeping away talented but psychologically fragile No. 1 pick Kwame Brown.

But we also know that this cursed spell of mass psychology can be broken. It usually takes a player or coach with the gumption to look it in the eye and laugh. You need a Pedro Martinez, who when asked about The Curse of the Bambino said, "Wake up the Bambino and let me face him—I'll drill him in the ass." You need someone cocky enough, brash enough and ballsy enough to stare at that damn gray cloud and smile. Very few in history have displayed this power: the

power to smile while seething as they changed the fortunes of allegedly cursed franchises. Pedro had it. Isiah Thomas had it. Jordan had it in Chicago. Lawrence Taylor had it. Joe Montana and Jerry Rice had it. I thought Paul Pierce was our Pedro: the one to drill this curse in the ass the way he drilled last-second shots with the game on the line. I think he can still be that guy. People remember that quote from Pedro about nailing Babe Ruth but forget that he said it in 2001 and that the Red Sox still had several more years of heartbreak before they finally won in 2004.

Pierce can still be our Pedro, but time is not on our side. So hang on, Paul. Please. I don't care if you average 5 points in 10 minutes next year as long as you are ready come Playoff time. We have John Wall. We have Bradley Beal. We still need our Neo: the man who can control the destiny of Bullets. That's Paul Pierce. And that's the damn truth.

Rob Carr/Getty Images

NOYZ

If you don't have any conflicts of interest these days, it's like you're not even trying....Shouts to the good folks at Hang the Net. All you SLAM fam in the Carolinas, check out the 25th and final event on July 23 at 2 p.m. at the Hanes Hosiery Community Center, 501 Reynolds Blvd in Winston-Salem....Clarence "Bevo" Francis....Bill Guthridge....Marques Haynes....Rasmus Larsen....Dena Lewis....Dai-jon Parker....Clarence "Bevo" Francis....Bill Guthridge....Marques Haynes....Rasmus Larsen....Dena Lewis....Dai-jon Parker....

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MOODY BLUES

What to ball in before cooling off at the pool.

Image **Jeff Harris**





SCOREBOARD

MEMPHIS	101	100
INDIANA	98	101
BOGUT	8	22
BARRETT	3	0
LIVINGSTON	3	0
BARRETT	2	1

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ANDRE IGUODALA
ON DWIGHT HOWARD

Before this season, Andre Iguodala had started every single game he played in the NBA. All 800-plus over 10 seasons, including the Playoffs. This season, he didn't start any. An All-Star in Philly (for one year, anyway), he's become just

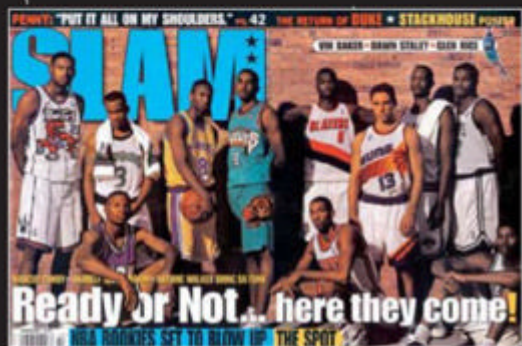
another cog in the Warrior machine, albeit one who can guard multiple positions and finish breaks in the traditional manner. Which, for GS, is something. Because, let's face it, a team that can end a two-on-one (or three-on-one)

break with an uncontested three and have it actually be the right decision doesn't have much need for dunks. Why settle for 2 points when you can get 3? And when the Splash Brothers are splashing, even Riley Curry knows that

open jumpers are cash money. Still, sometimes the opportunity presents itself. Like in Game 2 of the Western Finals. Dwight Howard left to fend for himself as the ball goes from Leandro Barbosa to Andrew Bogut to

a trailing Iguodala whom Dwight can only watch as he soars past, throwing down hard enough to send the ball back toward midcourt, leaving a tangled net—and a flummoxed Howard—in its wake. Splash that. —**RUSS BENGTSON**

LAST CALL



SLAM 15,
FEBRUARY 1997



SLAM 24,
MARCH 1998



SLAM 39,
JANUARY 2000



SLAM 43,
JUNE 2000



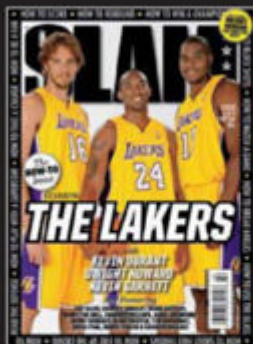
SLAM 66,
FEBRUARY 2003



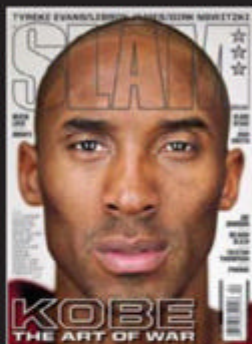
SLAM 129,
JULY 2009



SLAM 131,
SEPTEMBER 2009



SLAM 134,
FEBRUARY 2010



SLAM 136,
APRIL 2010



SLAM 141,
SEPTEMBER 2010



SLAM 146,
APRIL 2011

KOBE BRYANT'S

HISTORIC CAREER APPEARS TO HAVE ONE MORE SEASON REMAINING. WHERE DOES THE BLACK MAMBA GO FROM HERE?

BY MARCEL MUTONI



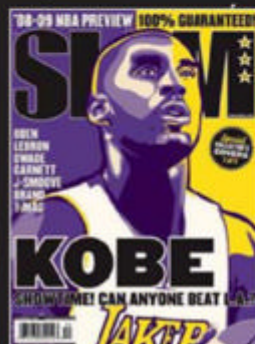
SLAM 74,
DECEMBER 2003



SLAM 97,
MAY 2006



SLAM 114,
FEBRUARY 2008



SLAM 123,
DECEMBER 2008



SLAM 126,
APRIL 2009



SLAM 148,
JUNE 2011



SLAM 158,
JUNE 2012



SLAM 170,
AUGUST 2013



SLAM 175,
MARCH 2014



SLAM 190,
AUGUST 2015

It's the night of a late-January game in Los Angeles, the Washington Wizards are in town to take on the moribund Lakers and the mood at the Staples Center is festive.

There's no indication from the crowd that their beloved Lakers will soon be tagged with a ninth consecutive loss, en route to the worst season in franchise history, a 21-61 stain. No one—not the fans, the local media, and not even the Lakers themselves—seems too bummed about the way things have unfolded—that a stunning total of 339 games were missed due to injuries and that Kobe Bryant's penultimate season in the NBA was cut short after just 35 games due to a torn rotator cuff in his right shoulder.

Instead, people are genuinely excited to be in the building, heartily cheer for their band of misfits in purple and gold and go home not especially unhappy despite the predictable L. It's the dirty little secret in L.A.: being at a Laker game, no matter how terrible the team may be, is still a pretty fun outing. Celebrities of all sorts dot the arena—

Ron Artest randomly shows up on this particular night (taking a seat next to courtside fixture Jimmy Goldstein) and receives the loudest cheers. The vibe is a decidedly carefree one, the unmistakable mark of lowered expectations.

The only people who are visibly and consistently bothered by what they're seeing seem to be head coach Byron Scott and, the few times he's heard from, Kobe. Who can forget Bryant's now-infamous appearance on *Jimmy Kimmel Live* in February, as he angrily and wordlessly watched a clip of his goofy teammates celebrating the end of a seven-game losing streak as though they'd won the title?

Bryant, 36, is set to make \$25 million in 2015-16, in what the Lakers are treating as his final season in the League. They promise to send him off with a lavish bang during his 20th campaign. Whether that includes a reasonably competitive roster, though, remains to be seen.

The only guarantee is that Kobe's approach will not change. "If anybody can come back, it's Kobe," Carlos Boozer says. "He

attacks his rehab and is a monster with his work ethic. I don't expect anything different."

"I don't see Kobe as a type of guy who wants to leave his legacy on those terms," adds Scott. "He wants to go out on his own terms."

One of the more remarkable careers in professional sports history is entering its last leg, and the fear among Kobe fans is that it will end, almost unfathomably, with a whimper.

Assuming the Lakers break out of their two-year free agency slump and convince an A-lister or two to sign on the dotted line this summer, can Kobe accept a reduced role like the one Paul Pierce has so readily embraced in Washington? That of a wily, fearless veteran, playing limited minutes and laying mostly in wait for opportunities to cut down unsuspecting and inexperienced opponents? Everything we know about the man would seem to indicate that his pride would never allow it.

"You think I'll hang around and average 19 or 18?" he rhetorically asked a group of reporters in February of 2012. "Hell no."

It's a fascinating conundrum for Bryant and the Lakers' front office: Would any superstar be willing to put up with Kobe at this fading stage of his career, with his body clearly failing him yet his brain unwilling to give an inch? Ask Dwight Howard.

For a generation of NBA fans, Bryant forces us to reckon with our own fragile states and looming mortality. His travails are a sobering reminder of the ups-and-downs one must negotiate over the course of a lifetime.

The bright-eyed kid with dark sunglasses perched atop his dome who announced his arrival by stating that he had "decided to skip college and take my talent to the NBA" (14 years before LeBron James infamously took his to South Beach) is now one of the elder statesmen in the League, treated as a beloved figure in many of the gyms by crowds that for two decades hated and feared him in equal measures.

It's staggering to contemplate all he's done through 19 seasons: a scrawny preps-to-pros phenom turning himself from a





**“IF ANYBODY
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WORK
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—BOOZER

bench-warmer to the youngest NBA All-Star ever, winning three Championships before the age of 25, playing with and outlasting Shaquille O'Neal in Hollywood, scoring 81 points in a single game (while averaging 35.4 ppg for the 2005-06 season), winning two more 'chips sans Shaq, passing his idol Michael Jordan on the all-time scoring list, and now, finally, transitioning into retirement.

There were also plenty of dark days for Kobe. For years he fought against a reputation as an unrepentant gunner, more concerned with his own personal glory than the success of the team. His own coach, the legendary Phil Jackson, penned a book following the '03-04 season that placed special focus on his inability to get through to the young superstar. The fans

in his hometown of Philadelphia refused to embrace him—their relentless booing at the '02 All-Star Game had Bryant fighting back tears while accepting the MVP trophy. Kobe was charged with sexual assault in Colorado in a case that was eventually dismissed in '04. Bryant's wife Vanessa filed for divorce in '11, though the two sides eventually reconciled. He endured three losing seasons and two heart-breaking NBA Finals defeats.

Before his body started to falter, watching Kobe Bryant play was a revelation. He was a furious blur, never satisfied even when he reached the pinnacle of his sport, considered by many as the greatest in the game. There's a famous image of Kobe (below) all alone after winning the '01 Finals, hunched over and greedily clutching the Larry

O'Brien Trophy with a bottle of expensive bubbly resting between his feet inside the triumphant Laker locker room. The look on his face isn't joy or relief; his expression is one of, "I told you motherfuckers. And there will be plenty more of these before it's all said and done."

His legacy was built on a maniacal will to win, a complete lack of fear in pressure situations and a desire and ability to score that was oftentimes unmatched in League history.

And by coming into prominence between the end of Jordan's era and building the bridge to LeBron, Kobe was always an interesting character study. He played with a passion that occasionally made even his peers uncomfortable. This was most evident during All-Star Games, which he treated like the Playoffs, while others seemingly just wanted to slowly work off hangovers from the previous night until the fourth quarter.

"It's just fun. We're some of the last of our generation," Pierce says. "That's pretty much a lot of the things we talked about on the court, a little bit of a trash in there. We also said there's no trash talkers in the League today coming up. It's a generation that's passing by and a lot of these guys are friends. I don't think this new generation is as competitive as we were with the past guys."

Bryant has always been almost cartoonishly obsessed with his craft. His mission was simple: Destroy all foes on the court. And he went about it with unusual intensity. This brazenly single-minded determination initially alienated much-older teammates who couldn't tolerate his cockiness on-court or understand why he wouldn't socialize with them off it (Kobe was technically too young to join them for drinks at the club, but above all, uninterested in this sort of fraternization). Instead, he was content to hoist up countless jumpers in empty gyms and pore over hours of film, team chemistry be damned.

His outsider status was nothing new. After all, when Kobe was 6 years old, his family moved to Italy and stayed for seven years so that his father, former NBA player Joe "Jellybean" Bryant—a former NBA player—could ex-

tend his pro basketball career.

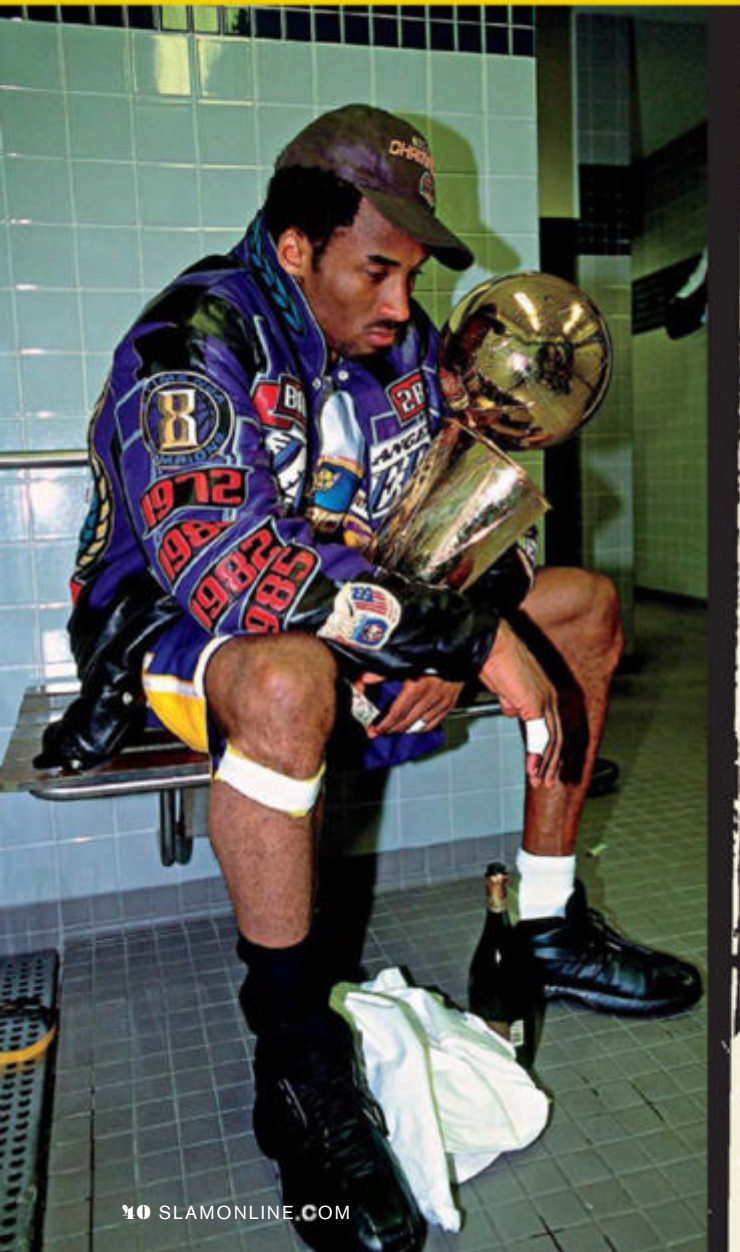
Bryant grew up and matured, of course, becoming a respected team leader and forming tight bonds with certain players around the NBA. But true friendship, he has admitted of late, remains a tricky field for him to navigate. Derek Fisher, his longtime teammate and perhaps closest friend, confided to *GQ* in 2010 that he'd never been to Kobe's Newport Beach mansion.

By making the wildly unpopular decision to ink their franchise player to a two-year, \$48.5 million contract in 2013, the Lakers basically ensured that the organization wouldn't be competitive for the duration of the pact, and once the unbelievable rash of injuries hit, tank mode was fully activated.

The Lakers want next season to be one grand sendoff for Kobe, but he's still desperate and crazy enough to think that winning a sixth and final title is within grasp. It's hard to imagine the team being considerably better than it has been the last two years—a span that saw them amass a mere 48 wins—let alone sniffing a Championship. Will Bryant grit his teeth and at least pretend to enjoy the nightly pomp and ceremony? Or will he be the weirdo awkwardly sulking in the corner as the party thrown in his honor rages on?

With his career winding down, and forced by devastating injuries to find ways to occupy his time that don't involve training or a basketball, Kobe has begun to let us into his private world a little bit. He was the executive producer of *Kobe Bryant's Muse*, a candid documentary that took measure of his life up to this point. There was poignant footage of him learning about the severity of a right shoulder injury that prematurely ended his season. He tearfully admitted that he thought he was the cause of his wife's miscarriage as a result of the stress brought on by his sexual assault charges. And even though it often traveled the familiar route that most sports docs take, the piece offered a rare peek behind the curtain and humanized Bryant in a way that really hadn't been done before.

He also gave a hint of what his post-NBA life will consist



of, announcing the creation of Kobe Inc. last year, a marketing company he formed to "own and help grow brands and ideas that challenge and redefine the sports industry while inspiring," Bryant told ESPN. "If it doesn't have the limbs of the sports industry, which I understand extremely well, then I probably won't touch it." TV networks will surely come hard after him once he retires, and even though TNT et al. would love for him to join their broadcasts, it would be shocking to see Kobe yukking it up with Shaq and the guys in front of the camera.

Ever since an Achilles injury in the 78th game of the 2012-13 season, one in which he played heroically and dragged a reluctant Laker team into the Playoffs, Bryant has only suited up 41 times. Meanwhile, the modern NBA game has continued to evolve, placing greater emphasis on quick passes, three-pointers, free throws and shots close to the rim. It no longer seems suited to Bryant's preferred style of play: bruising post-play is out for the most part, and volume shooters with a penchant for long two-pointers are now met with scorn and derision by the basketball cognoscenti.

Only four players in the history of the League have played more regular-season and Playoff minutes than Kobe Bryant. His once-blazing speed and otherworldly hops gone, Kobe now plods up and down the court, looking for opportunities to back down smaller defenders and fire off a fadeaway. Last season, he averaged 22.3 points a game on a career-low 37.3 percent shooting. His filter-free media interviews and Twitter feed have become a lot more entertaining than his increasingly creaky game.

It's simpler and much easier to stomach thinking of Kobe now in terms of what he once was. He is, at 36 years old and in declining basketball health, largely a figment of our shared past. A glorious relic, whose greatest triumphs live on in worshipful YouTube montages, but a relic nonetheless.

And despite his immense ego, even Bryant seems to grudgingly acknowledge this reality. There has been a growing willingness to discuss retirement, and three



THE NBA HAS EVOLVED; VOLUME SHOOTERS WITH A PENCHANT FOR LONG TWO-POINTERS ARE NOW MET WITH SCORN AND DERISION BY THE BASKETBALL COGNOSCENTI.

consecutive season-ending injuries appear to have sapped some of his legendary zeal for offseason workouts.

"When the end comes, I'm fine with that," Bryant recently told Ahmad Rashad in a televised chat. "I'm not afraid of change. I'm not afraid of evolving. I'm not afraid of it." Ever the optimist, however, Bryant added that he's hoping for a

"rebirth" of sorts next season.

The end of Kobe Bryant's basketball journey is drawing nigh, and though inevitable, saying goodbye comes with a tinge of sadness and concern for his fans. We worry about him struggling to fill the void, perhaps falling into the same trap Jordan did by hanging around long past his expiration date, limping through two forgettable seasons in DC.

Unlike MJ, who despite his own obsession with the game enjoyed life quite a bit away from the court, the popular caricature of Bryant is that of a robot created for the sole purpose of winning at basketball. But this can't really be true, can it? There has to be more to the man than what he does in that 94x50 foot rectangle.

Kobe Bryant has a chance to control the narrative moving forward, to go against the conventional wisdom that his über-competitive nature will prevent him from gracefully bowing out when his current deal expires and let the burgeoning crop of superstars carry the NBA forward. He has always bucked against the norms set by others, and to great personal benefit, so why not do it again when the appropriate time comes to hang up his Nikes for good?

A first ballot trip to the Hall of Fame awaits Bryant, and his status as one of the 10 greatest basketball players to ever breathe is secure. Realistically, there is nothing left for him to prove to anyone, not even himself.

But like everything else in his life, Kobe Bean Bryant will dictate the terms of how his singularly brilliant career ends. **\$**

The Rivalry

Magic Johnson and Larry Bird's battles of the 1980s ignited the NBA, helping the League hit previously unreachable heights.

BY MICHAEL BRADLEY

When the Los Angeles Lakers traveled across the country in 1985 to play the sixth game of the NBA Finals in Boston, they did so without GM Jerry West. The Logo had endured six championship round losses to the Celtics, and he had become convinced that he was responsible for the Lakers' futility. In West's mind, he was a human cracked mirror. It didn't matter that L.A. had a 3-2 lead in games and two chances to close things out. Bitter memories of crushing defeats haunted him, and he stayed out in California. Losing to Boston had been so hard for West that the idea that it could happen again—as it had the previous season—revolted him. “He thought he was bad luck,” says Pat Riley, coach of the ‘85 Lakers. “He was cursed, because he lost all those games in the ‘60s. He wouldn’t even go to the games.”

The Lakers had lost a pair of championship series to the Knicks during West's 14 All-Star seasons with the franchise. They fell to Milwaukee, St. Louis and San Francisco in the Western Conference finals. But none of that stung like being subdued by the Celtics. Again and again.

And again. So, West stayed home. And the Lakers won. It was a coincidence, of course, unless it wasn't. In order for L.A. to get rid of the his-

torical “albatross” that Riley believed the team carried, West just couldn't be there. But everybody else could. By the time the two teams met in '85, they had defined professional basketball in a way that wasn't replicated anywhere else. They only met three times in the Finals during the 1980s, but so much of professional basketball depended upon their rivalry. Players like West, Elgin Baylor, Wilt Chamberlain, Bill Russell and Sam Jones may have ruled the '60s, but the relationship between the two teams was one-sided then. In the '80s, it was Larry Bird vs Magic Johnson in a made-for-TV struggle that saved the League from its messy 1970s self.

That's no understatement. Without Bird and Magic, the NBA might still be showing its Finals games on tape delay at 11:30 Eastern. Those two turned a sport that was in complete chaos into an athletic happening, and their battles made the Lakers-Celtics rivalry real for all basketball fans. The teams played twice a year during the regular season, and just about everybody tuned in. When they locked up for the Big Prize, it became a national obsession.

Boston had beaten the Lakers in 1984, and Riley still blames himself for a Game 2 decision that led to a Celtic victory. In '85, when L.A.

finally broke the string of seven straight Finals losses to its ancient rival, everyone who had ever donned Forum Blue and Gold rejoiced.

“Without a doubt, '85 was the gold standard of Championships for me,” says Riley, who also won a title as a player with the Lakers in 1972.

It took some time for the rivalry to reach its pinnacle in the '80s. The Lakers played Philadelphia for the title three times (1980, '82 and '83) before L.A. met the Celtics in the Finals. Sure, those Lakers-Sixers series were great, what with Magic playing hero in Game 6 back in '80, Dr. J's aerial acrobatics earlier in that series and the fo-fi-fo Sixers breakthrough in 1983. And Philly-Boston had plenty of fascinating storylines, not to mention a substantial dose of misery for Sixers fans. But nothing could match the allure of Boston and L.A.

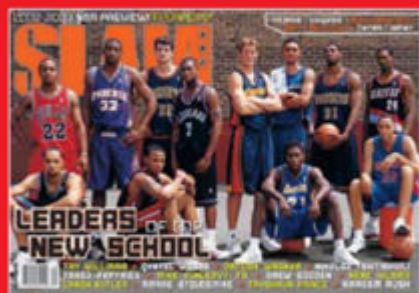
Even though the NBA was still on the sporting outskirts in the 1960s—well behind baseball and football—the Championship series between the two teams had featured enough star power to fill the Hall of Fame. The '80s editions were packed with talent, too. L.A. had Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, James Worthy, Jamaal Wilkes and Byron Scott. Boston countered with Kevin McHale, Robert Parish and Dennis Johnson. But the real allure of the rivalry at its apex, more so than the history

and list of superstar players, was the magnetism of Bird and Magic.

Johnson was so charismatic that he even stoked the smoldering embers in the stoic Abdul-Jabbar. Fans couldn't help but tune in to see the next no-look pass or breakneck fastbreak, all accomplished with a wide smile that seemed to indicate a childlike love of the game. Bird had no such outward sign of basketball joy, but that didn't mean his passion for the game was any less robust than Magic's. He thirsted to win and played with a quiet fury that provided a perfect counterpart to Magic's joyful approach. Though they spent their careers 3,000 miles apart on the map, they will be forever linked to the NBA's renaissance. And by providing so many highlights and so much drama during their regular season and Finals encounters, the players brought the NBA into the sporting and cultural forefront.

It doesn't matter today whether Boston and the Lakers are struggling to regain their championship personalities. When they reemerge, the basketball world will be waiting, just as it was when the teams met for the title in 2008 and 2010. The best rivalries never stop. They simmer. And when the flame rises again, everybody feels the heat. And loves it. Even Jerry West. **\$**





SLAM 65, DECEMBER 2002

SCOUTS

THE

TOP

10

A FIRST-ROUND DRAFT PICK IN 2002, **QYNTEL WOODS**

WILL GO DOWN AS AN NBA BUST, BUT HE'S QUIETLY SPENT THE LAST DECADE AS A SUPERSTAR IN EUROPE, WHERE HE'S KNOWN AS THE "POLISH LEBRON."

BY ABE SCHWADRON

It's 6 a.m. in Portland. A decade ago, Qyntel Woods might have just arrived home from a night of partying. Today, his brief, promising NBA days firmly in the rear view, he's half a world away. Literally. "It's 3 o'clock here—3 p.m.," he says over the phone. "I'm in Poland."

His Southern accent is less pronounced than it was when he last graced the pages of this magazine, but it flares up when he gets excited, like when he talks about his kids or the prospect of finally coming home for the summer at the conclusion of another seemingly interminable season abroad.

Since playing his last NBA game in 2006, Woods has quietly put together a prolific playing career overseas, with stops in Greece, Spain, Italy, Russia, Israel and Poland, where he's known affectionately as "Polish LeBron." But Qyntel's long, winding journey to success as a professional basketball player has been far from the glamorous NBA career he seemed destined for as a rookie in 2002.

At 21 years old, Qyn was a 6-9, 230-pound monster from South Memphis who had NBA executives salivating over his blend of guard skills and raw power. So he passed on a scholarship offer from John Calipari at the University of Memphis and made the leap to the League straight out of tiny Northeast Mississippi Community College.

Portland selected Woods with the 21st pick in the first round. Bob Whitsitt, Portland's GM at the time, says the Blazers had essentially narrowed the pick to two: Woods or Tayshaun Prince. "I think I liked Tayshaun better than Qyntel, but it was so close, and at that time I was running 14 companies including a football team in Seattle [the Seahawks] so I deferred to the scouts," he says. "But I liked Qyntel a lot." [Prince was picked two slots later by Detroit and started on the

Pistons' 2004 title team. Whitsitt resigned as Blazers GM after the 2002-03 season.]

Woods was hurt; he expected to go higher. After all, scouts lauded him as a Lottery pick leading up to the Draft. The Lakers were reported to be ready to trade into the top 10 to get him. *The New York Times* described him as "a little of Tracy McGrady, a little of Kobe Bryant" and "something of Paul Pierce." At one point, ESPN's Chad Ford suggested he might even go No. 1, ahead of Yao Ming and Jay Williams, the eventual top two picks.

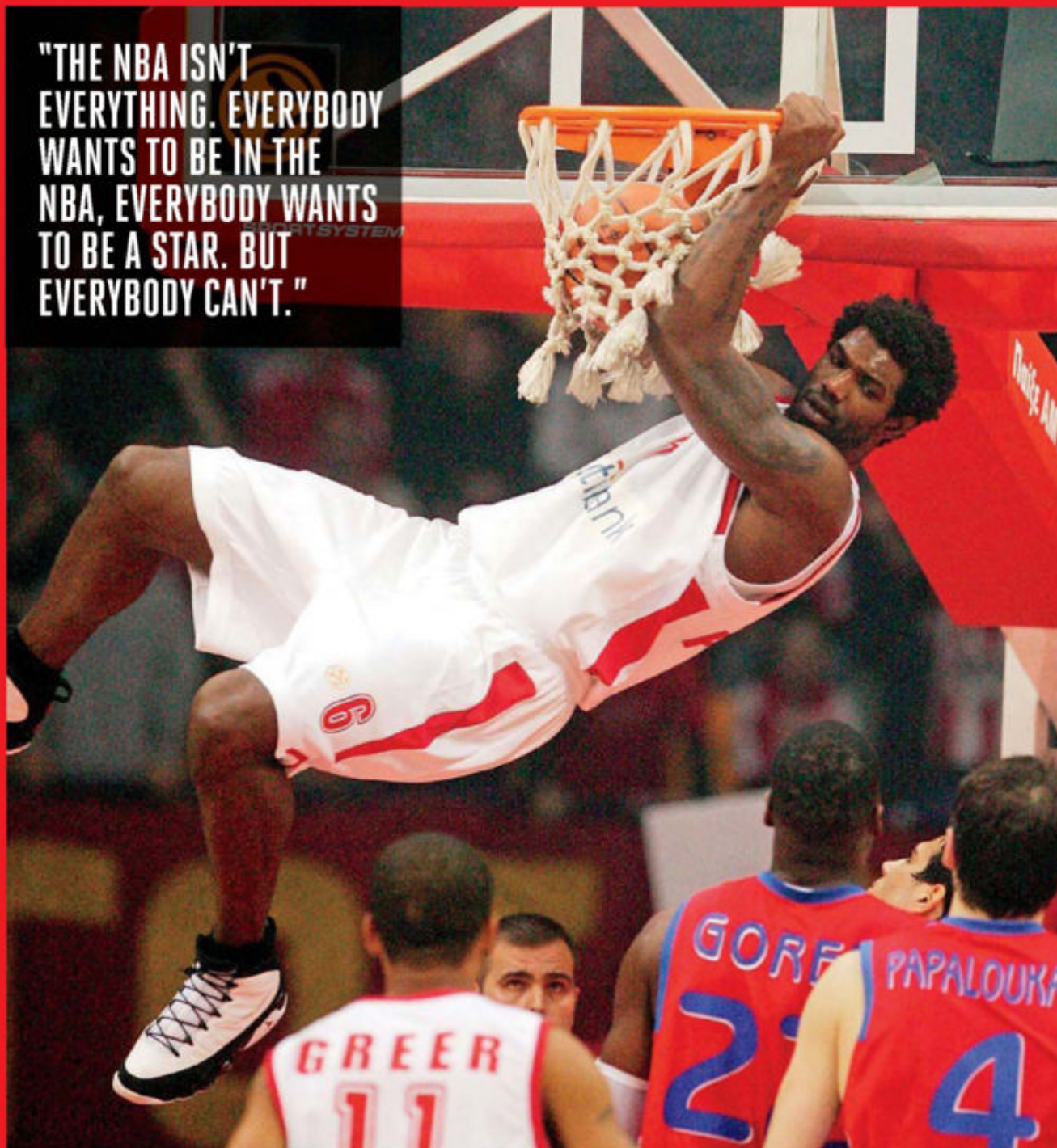
Plus, the Blazers' roster was stacked with vets. Rasheed Wallace, Derek Anderson, Bonzi Wells, Damon Stoudamire, Scottie Pippen, Ruben Patterson, Arvydas Sabonis, Dale Davis. Qyntel knew he'd never see any meaningful minutes.

Arriving in Portland, Qyntel gravitated to Zach Randolph, the team's first-round pick the previous season. Both came from humble beginnings and suddenly had more cash than they knew what to do with. Randolph had at least been exposed to the bright lights of DI basketball. Qyntel came from crowds as small as 150. He was in over his head.

"At the time, Zach Randolph was much different than he is now," says Jason Quick, a senior writer at *The Oregonian* who covered the Blazers for 13 years. "He was young, he was making money, he was the focal point of the team and he had this renegade lifestyle because of it. He thought he was untouchable and took Qyntel along for the ride."

Late nights. Women. Weed. Looking back, Woods says he knew he was acting out, but it didn't matter. "At the time, me being so young, and being in the NBA and having money, I really didn't care, to be honest. I was just like, It'll be OK. Everything will be OK. Even though I knew I was doing bad shit,

"THE NBA ISN'T EVERYTHING. EVERYBODY WANTS TO BE IN THE NBA, EVERYBODY WANTS TO BE A STAR. BUT EVERYBODY CAN'T."



the mentality of an NBA player is like, You're above everything. That's how I felt when I was young—invincible. Like, I'm untouchable."

The transgressions of that now-infamous "Jail Blazers" team are well documented. A few weeks into Qyntel's rookie season, Wells was suspended for spitting on the Spurs' Danny Ferry. Later that month, team co-captains Stoudamire and Wallace were pulled over and cited for marijuana possession on their way home from a game in Seattle. ("That was the thing when I was like, Fuck," Qyntel says of that particular episode. "I was like, Oh my God, what have I got myself into?") A few days later, Patterson was ar-

rested for domestic abuse. In January, Sheed was suspended for threatening a ref outside the Rose Garden. In April, Randolph was suspended for fracturing Patterson's eye socket in a practice fight—one that started as a beef between Woods and Patterson. And later that month, Qyntel was pulled over for speeding and had weed in the car; during the traffic stop he reportedly offered only his trading card and two credit cards as identification.

"I was put around the same guys that I was coming from being around. I don't want to say thug—it sounds bad—but, guys from the neighborhood," he says of trying to navigate his first NBA season. "Basically, thugs."

On the court, Qyntel played just six minutes a game during a rookie year he describes as being in "shambles." His second season brought more dysfunction. The Blazers were over the hill, and while he competed hard enough in practice to earn a few more minutes, when he wasn't playing, he was lost.

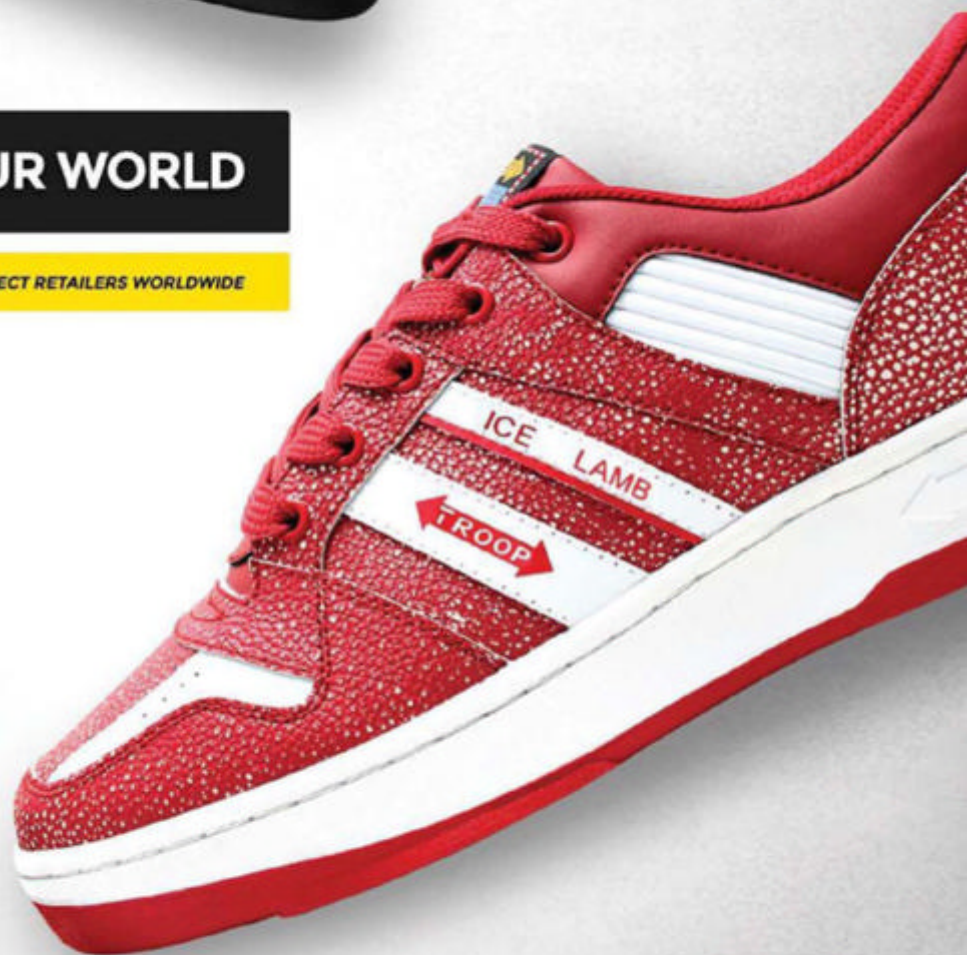
Twelve-year vet Tracy Murray spent his final season in Portland, where his locker was next to Qyntel's. But Murray says the team asked him to focus instead on mentoring Travis Outlaw, Portland's first-round pick in 2003, who was fresh out of high school.

"There was no one that embraced me and taught me the rights and wrongs of what the



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NBA is about," Woods says. "Everybody was doing their own thing, already had confidence. So I'm doing some of the things they were doing, thinking it's OK. But in actuality, it wasn't. I was doing everything wrong."

After getting booked alongside teammate Darius Miles for his part in a strip club parking lot brawl in April 2004, Woods vowed to get his shit together. He showed up at Summer League with 15 extra pounds of muscle and without his signature braids. He even went to rehab to try to kick his weed habit.

But following the best camp of his career, Qyntel was investigated for dogfighting and failed a League-mandated drug test. The Blazers suspended him indefinitely without pay, and he pleaded guilty to first-degree misdemeanor animal abuse. He didn't play a single game in '04-'05 for the team.

In the wake of his disastrous flameout, the Blazers installed a Director of Player Programs (a position held by the late Jerome Kersey for several years) to guide the franchise's young players. "Qyntel had a lasting impression on the franchise; he became the poster child of what was wrong with the NBA at that time," recalls Quick. "But he was never vilified the way Darius Miles was, or even Zach Randolph. You could see he was a good kid, so naïve. He just didn't know better."

The Blazers waived Qyntel in '05 and he signed in Miami, playing sparingly for a team that lost in the Eastern Conference finals to Prince and the defending champion Pistons, led by coach Larry Brown. Miami then dealt Qyn to Boston as part of a blockbuster trade that brought Antoine Walker to the Heat. The Celtics waived him in the preseason, and he signed with the Knicks in December of '05.

New Yorkers won't remember Woods' stint in a Knicks uniform fondly, but it was easily the best year of his NBA career. As the Knicks coach, Brown took a liking to Qyntel, who averaged career highs in nearly every category, including points (6.7 per game), rebounds (3.9), field-goal percentage (51 percent) and minutes (20.7) in 49 games, starting 16. To this day, Woods says Brown is the only person he ever trusted to look out for his best interests in the NBA, and considers him more a father figure than a coach. "I was his guy, he was my guy," Qyntel says.

The Knicks got rid of both Brown and Woods after one season. Qyntel was invited to a handful of training camps before the '06-'07 season and spent a month in the D-League, but no NBA offers materialized. Brown counseled him to go overseas, so Woods packed his bags for Greece, where he joined Euroleague powerhouse Olympiacos.

In the years since, Qyntel has been one of the most successful Americans playing in Europe. And though he's barnstormed through a half-dozen countries, including earning All-Star honors in the tough Greek League, he's found the most success in Poland, where he's won three Polish League titles. In 2010, he won the Polish League MVP and led Asseco Prokom to the

Euroleague quarterfinals—deeper than any Polish team in history. Eurobasket.com even named him to the All-Euroleague First Team.

The 34-year-old returned to Poland this past season and led AZS Koszalin in scoring (19.3 ppg) and rebounding (7.2 rpg). His ability to run the floor, finish and make plays off the dribble combined with his overwhelming physical dominance (he is often the largest player on the floor) led to the "Polish LeBron"

"EVEN THOUGH I KNEW I WAS DOING BAD SHIT, THE MENTALITY OF AN NBA PLAYER IS, LIKE, YOU'RE UNTOUCHABLE."

nickname. "I'm a superstar here," Qyn says.

For a long time, he was angry he wasn't in the NBA. Five years ago, Woods was still eyeing a return, with teams like Cleveland and Washington rumored to be interested.

But having matured, Woods is finally at peace. He plans to play two or three more seasons abroad before calling it a career and coming home to be with his children.

"I'm really happy. The NBA isn't everything. Everybody wants to be in the NBA, everybody wants to be a star. But everybody can't."

In fact, Woods says he doesn't keep up with the NBA during his time away from basketball, preferring instead to decompress by reading, watching movies or exploring the long list of foreign cities in which he's played over the past eight years.

"If you're not a star like LeBron or KD, if it's a younger guy in the League, I don't even know who they are," he admits. Of course, it's highly unlikely those younger guys know who Qyntel Woods is, either. But they should. **\$**



Sam Forencich/NBAE/Getty Images

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COME HOME WITH ME

AFTER A TOPSY-TURVY NBA CAREER, STEPHON MARBURY'S UNLIKELY JOURNEY BROUGHT HIM PEACE AND SUCCESS IN CHINA.

BY KARAN MADHOK

What is Home? Home was Coney Island, the Brooklyn neighborhood that birthed his game. Home was Georgia Tech, the college that developed his early stardom. Home was Minnesota, the city with the NBA team that drafted him. For some stretches, home was New Jersey, Phoenix and Boston. Home really felt like home back in New York when the Knicks traded for him.

Home, now, for Stephon Xavier Marbury, is Beijing, China. It's a spacious apartment in a high-rise building in the heart of the city, surrounded by other high-rises and shopping complexes that have contributed to this historic city's transformation into a concrete jungle. Home is

a couple of metro stops away from Tiananmen Square, in the capital of the most populated nation in the world, of a civilization thousands of years old.

It's here—at home—where I find Marbury, a month after he turns 38, on a cold afternoon in late March. It's been only a few days since he led the Beijing Ducks to their third Chinese Basketball Association (CBA) title in four years and grabbed the finals MVP award. I find him relaxed, alone at his apartment, draped in his 361° brand t-shirt and sweatpants, eating a Subway sandwich for lunch and listening to the Drake mixtape out of his smartphone.

It's here, at home, where he finally talks to SLAM again. Where we talk about his journey: his

NBA career, his rise, his departure, his resurrection in China. It's here, at his new home, where I ask about his old one. About his brothers, about his friends in the NBA, about Coney Island.

I ask him if he ever gets homesick.

"No."

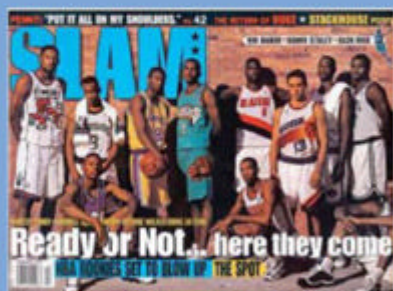
"Never?" I ask, "When you think of what 'home' is?"

"This is home," he says, staring directly at me. "Beijing is home. I mean, America's gonna always be home. But this is where I live at—this is home. This is where my life is at. Here in China."

There seem to be two separate lives to Stephon Marbury: "Starbury" in the US, "Ma Bu Li" in China. Starbury was the high school phenom from Brooklyn

who broke New York City records and was a cult hero even before getting selected fourth overall by the Timberwolves in the heralded 1996 NBA Draft. He was the score-first point guard much ahead of his time who, despite enjoying strong individual highs, never quite found permanence in the League. Nearly every team he was a part of was happier to see him gone, and by his last NBA years, he was reduced to a mere caricature of pro basketball careers gone wrong. He was blasted by critics, maligned by legal cases against him, suffered personal loss and live-streamed a nervous breakdown.

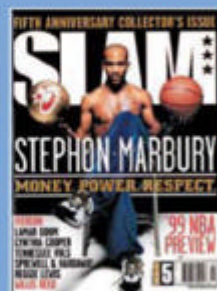
So, at age 32, he packed up and left. Left the League, left the country and left what he now calls the "negative energy"



SLAM 15, FEBRUARY 1997



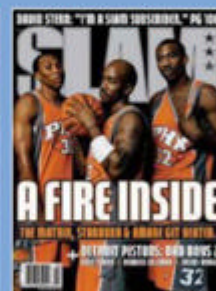
SLAM 21, OCTOBER 1997



SLAM 31, JANUARY 1999



SLAM 48, FEBRUARY 2001



SLAM 75, FEBRUARY 2004





behind. He traveled nearly 7,000 miles, crossed the Pacific and resurrected his career in China. Former NBA players had taken their talents to China before, but no one who had previously done so had a higher profile than him. The Chinese named him Ma Bu Li, and after two years of teething troubles in Shanxi and Foshan, he joined the Beijing Ducks, making the team and the city his home in 2011.

"At first, it was a trying time, because it was all brand new," he says of his early years in China. "I was ready to do something different and be a part of something different. I wanted to evolve to a new area in my life and in basketball. It was a trying time because of the culture barrier and not being able to speak the language and not being able to communicate.

"I understand the culture now," he adds. "I love the food. I now know why people do what they do when they do it. Even though I can't speak the language as well as I would like, I know a little bit more than when

I first came here. It's just growth."

The growth off the court correlated with success on the court, and despite his age, Marbury has remained The Man (there's the annual CBA legend of "Playoff Marbury") for the Ducks, leading them to back-to-back-to-back championships. I suggest that, if he stayed on his traditional route in the NBA, his role would've probably gotten smaller as he got older, and I ask if it's been tougher to continue playing at a high level with age.

"I wouldn't necessarily say that if I was playing in the NBA, if I got older, that my role would've changed," he answers with characteristic defiance. "How I played in the NBA and how I play now is the same. It's no different. But I think playing here, you have to do more, because a lot more is required out of the foreigners [CBA teams are usually only allowed two foreign players each—Ed.]. So consistency is something that plays a major role here in being able to score, play defense, trying to get everybody involved to do all

"IVERSON AND MYSELF, WE KINDA CHANGED THE DYNAMIC OF HOW THE TRADITIONAL POINT GUARDS PLAYED."

of the different things that are needed to play at a higher level."

Back in the NBA, being a point guard is perhaps the deepest and toughest gig in the League now, with damn near every team featuring an All-Star or All-Star-potential starting PG. I try to make him imagine that alternate universe, the universe where he's still playing in the NBA, having never attempted the China experiment. What kind of role do you see yourself in if you were still in the NBA? I ask.

"I see myself as a starting point guard," he says. "I probably wouldn't be as dominant as when I was younger, but I would definitely still have my same attributes on court. My style wouldn't be any different.

"[Allen] Iverson and myself,

we kinda changed the dynamic of how the traditional point guards played," he continues. "Now, when you see the athletic guards that are dunking and doing the things that they are doing, Iverson and myself, we came in doing things like that, which changed the perspective of how people viewed the point guard. We took a lot of flak because we came in and changed the game."

Are there any younger guys that you see a bit of yourself in?

"I like Derrick Rose," he answers. "I like Westbrook, too. But Derrick Rose is my favorite. I like the kid Curry, too. He's having a really good year."

Maybe home exists not in a specific, physical place, but in the legend built by history. By words

and photographs by scribes, illustrators and photographers. By the journals that time will preserve—in paper and online.

Marbury began when SLAM did. He was the magazine's first-ever high school diarist and appeared on a multitude of SLAM covers over the years. I pull out my phone to slide through photographs of those old covers. Each evokes a different reaction, a different moment in his career, telling a story through images a thousand times better than through words.

We see the cover of SLAM 15, featuring the legendary 1996 Draft class, a class that gave the League Marbury and AI, as well as Kobe Bryant, Steve Nash, Ray Allen, Shareef Abdur-Rahim, Peja Stojakovic, Antoine Walker and more. I ask if he truly believes this class was the greatest ever.

"By far."

Do you compare it to 2003? LeBron, Wade...

"It's not..." he interrupts me. "No class can mess with our class."

We scroll next to see the famous "KG and Showbiz" cover, featuring the exciting but ultimately ill-fated pairing of Kevin Garnett and Marbury in Minnesota at the end of Steph's rookie year. He doesn't react.

I show him the cover of SLAM's fifth anniversary special in January of 1999. He was on the cover again, posing in Coney Island, a few years later. He was traded to the Phoenix Suns in 2001 and appeared on the 75th issue cover with Shawn Marion and Amar'e Stoudemire.

"Anytime you get on the cover of a magazine, especially SLAM Magazine that all of the kids like to go buy and read about, it's cool. All the times was different times in my career," he remembers. "It was all good times."

When the times were good, they were great. Starbury was named Third-Team All-NBA in 2000 and '03, and played in the '01 and '03 All-Star Games. For the majority of his career, he was the only player since Oscar Robertson to average 20 points and 8 assists per game.

But his greatest day in the NBA, he says, was his very first one. "When I got drafted, that was the best time. Everything else was just basketball and business. It was nothing more

and nothing else. Making it to the NBA was my only thing. That was the only dream that I had as a kid."

Did you have any regrets?

"No."

None at all?

He shakes his head.

Marbury's NBA dream seemed to turn into a nightmare in his last few years in the League. After not returning to the Celtics in 2009, the world around him began to collapse. The low-point came during an infamous live-stream from his bedroom as he spoke about depression, ate Vaseline, lip-synched "Barbie Girl" and broke down crying.

Earlier this year, Marbury finally opened up about his suicidal thoughts during that dark period to HBO's *Real Sports*, and about eventually making it out to the light.

"That interview was fascinating," I told him, "because very few individuals could talk about the dark days so openly. Was that a tough process for you? To be so open about it?"

"No," he answers, "It's something that happened. I don't mind telling something that happened, that went on in my life. During those days, no one knew what was going on. Nobody knew I had lost my aunt, my coach, my father, all within a month. When we were burying people, you know, it wasn't really anyone's business. That was my life. That was something that I was going through in my trying times."

His voice begins to crack as he speaks, but he doesn't stop.

"Speaking about that was important for people to have a different understanding, because things have changed," he continues, "because things have changed for the better. It's a different story. It's triumph. Some people think, 'Oh, you play basketball, you make money, you live this life,' that you're exempt from the natural crisis of what goes on in human life, as far as being in an emotional state because of something that has happened. For me, sharing was easy. I said that because I wanted people to understand what was going on with me, what pushed me and what motivated me."

Maybe Home is where the love is?

While delivering three championships to Beijing in the last four years, Marbury has also become a true cultural icon in the city. A statue of him stands outside the MasterCard Center where the Ducks play. Last winter, he was the subject and the star of the play *I Am Marbury* that was staged for a few days in Beijing. *The China Post* has released a collection of stamps and post cards in his honor. He was the only non-Chinese person named in the list of Beijing's Top 10 Model Citizens of 2014. The Chinese, especially Beijingers, have accepted Marbury as their own. And he is fully accepting the nation, too, applying for a Chinese Green Card (permanent residency) this year.

"I've said it once and I'll say it again," he says. "These are the best fans on the planet. I don't say that loosely because I play in Beijing and I love Beijing. Whenever you have fans that bring that type of energy, it's different and it's rare. And it's consistent throughout the whole game. The fan base—you can't really put a price tag on that or compare it to anything."

Home is different for us all. For some, it's a physical place; for some, it's a feeling; for others, it's their legacy. For Marbury, it seems that home is where he can continue to find bliss in his first true love: basketball.

"Basketball is everywhere," he smiles. "It's not just the NBA. The game has changed. Basketball is global. I know I wasn't the first American to come to China and I won't be the last. I'm just the American who came here and did it my way. I came here. I've been real. I was open. I left myself completely vulnerable for people to understand me."

"I can play as long as I want. Honestly, it depends on my body. When my body says 'That's it,' then I'll stop. So, I could say that I want to play another two-three years. It's fun right now. It's fun winning. So you're driven to continue to work hard because the success of winning feeds you."

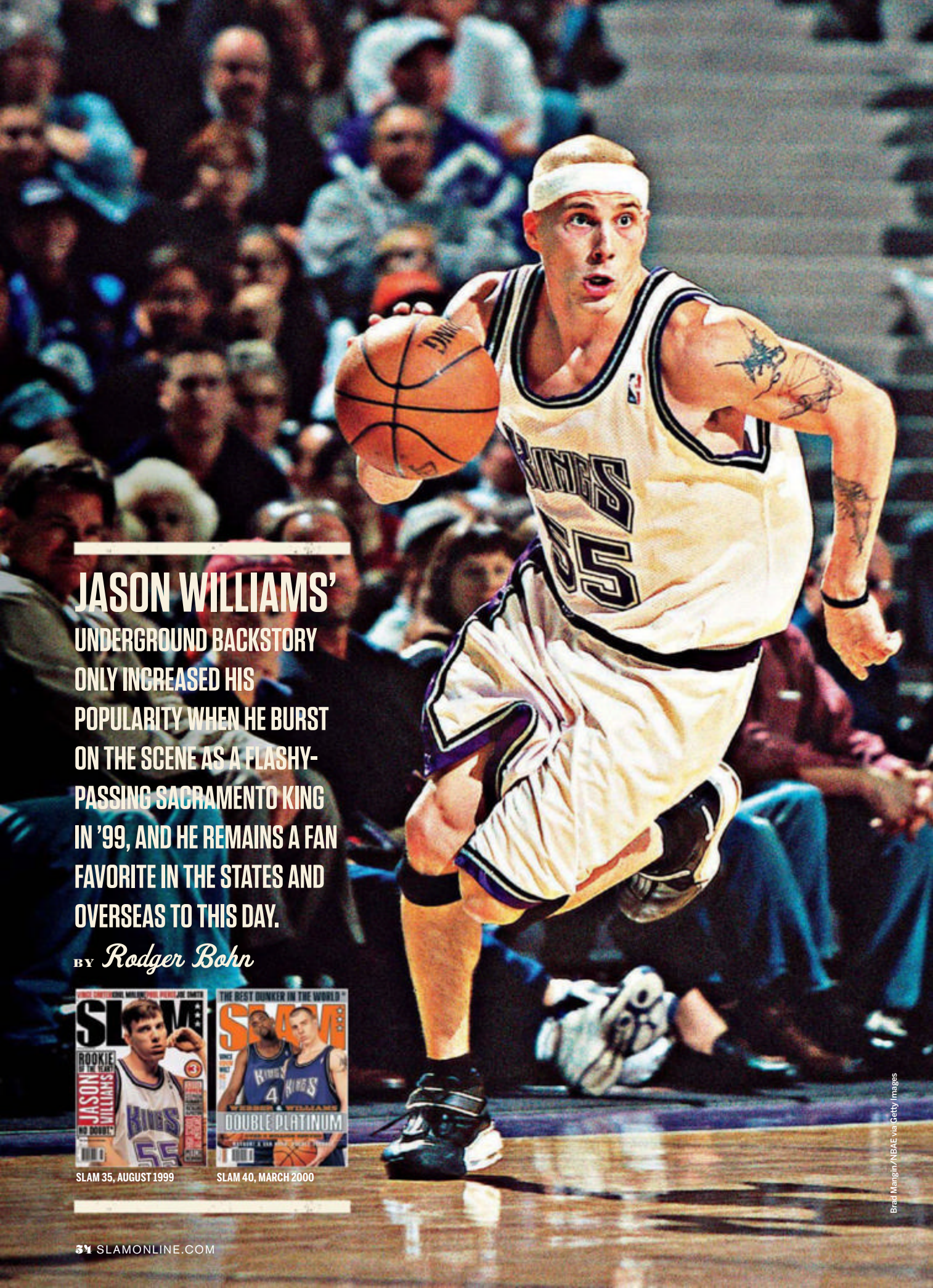
And you want to keep winning in Beijing?

"Why not?"

Do you see yourself in China long-term?

"I'm not going," he says. "This is my home. I'm going nowhere." §



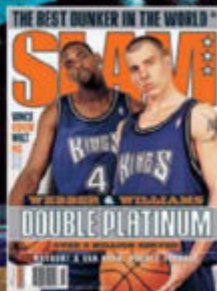
A full-page action shot of Jason Williams, a Sacramento Kings player, dribbling a basketball. He is wearing a white Kings jersey with the number 55 and a white headband. He has tattoos on his left arm. The background is a blurred crowd of spectators in a basketball arena.

JASON WILLIAMS'
UNDERGROUND BACKSTORY
ONLY INCREASED HIS
POPULARITY WHEN HE BURST
ON THE SCENE AS A FLASHY-
PASSING SACRAMENTO KING
IN '99, AND HE REMAINS A FAN
FAVORITE IN THE STATES AND
OVERSEAS TO THIS DAY.

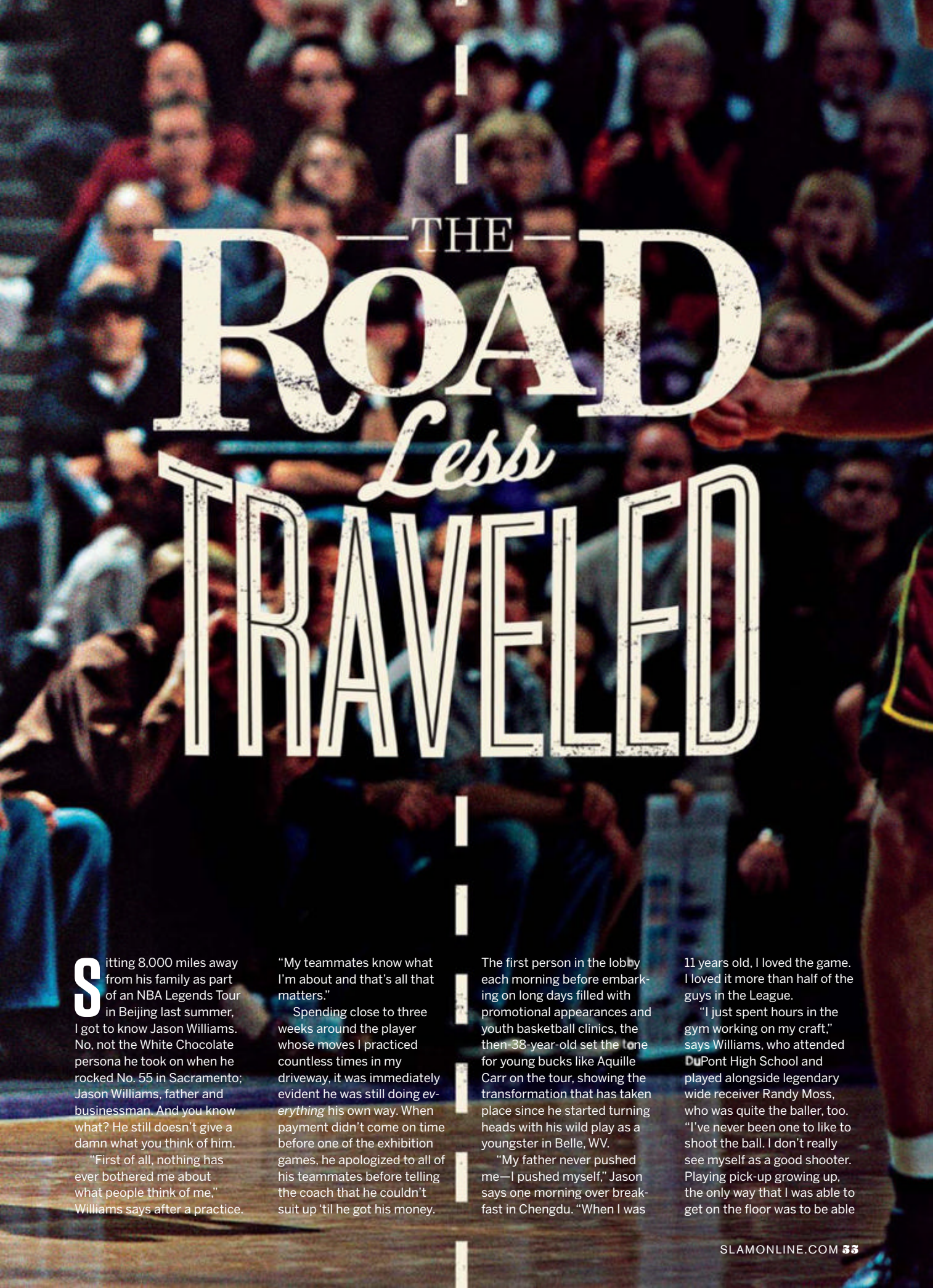
BY *Rodger Bohn*



SLAM 35, AUGUST 1999



SLAM 40, MARCH 2000



THE ROAD *Less* TRAVELED

Sitting 8,000 miles away from his family as part of an NBA Legends Tour in Beijing last summer, I got to know Jason Williams. No, not the White Chocolate persona he took on when he rocked No. 55 in Sacramento; Jason Williams, father and businessman. And you know what? He still doesn't give a damn what you think of him.

"First of all, nothing has ever bothered me about what people think of me," Williams says after a practice.

"My teammates know what I'm about and that's all that matters."

Spending close to three weeks around the player whose moves I practiced countless times in my driveway, it was immediately evident he was still doing *everything* his own way. When payment didn't come on time before one of the exhibition games, he apologized to all of his teammates before telling the coach that he couldn't suit up 'til he got his money.

The first person in the lobby each morning before embarking on long days filled with promotional appearances and youth basketball clinics, the then-38-year-old set the tone for young bucks like Aquille Carr on the tour, showing the transformation that has taken place since he started turning heads with his wild play as a youngster in Belle, WV.

"My father never pushed me—I pushed myself," Jason says one morning over breakfast in Chengdu. "When I was

11 years old, I loved the game. I loved it more than half of the guys in the League.

"I just spent hours in the gym working on my craft," says Williams, who attended DuPont High School and played alongside legendary wide receiver Randy Moss, who was quite the baller, too. "I've never been one to like to shoot the ball. I don't really see myself as a good shooter. Playing pick-up growing up, the only way that I was able to get on the floor was to be able



“EVERYTHING you seen me do, with the exception of the elbow pass, I PRACTICED THOUSANDS OF TIMES.”

to pass because I couldn't really get my shot off since I was smaller than everyone.”

The aforementioned work helped Jason earn a few collegiate offers, but in the pre-internet (and pre-mixtape) recruiting generation, he didn't receive anywhere near the attention that he'd get today.

Having briefly committed to Providence and spending a second at Fork Union Military Academy, things were up in the air. In fact, if it weren't for his pops, he probably would have wound up at a traditional Big East power.

“I didn't get recruited too heavy, man—Virginia Tech,

Providence and St. John's, really,” he says of his recruitment. “I really wanted to go to St. John's. Me and my father drove to Providence and went through New York. My dad said, ‘Nah, you ain't living in New York. No way.’”

A young Kentucky assistant had been recruiting him lightly, but the Wildcats didn't think enough of him to offer him a scholarship. When that same assistant got a head-coaching job right down the road in WV, though, JWill's college destination was a wrap.

“The only reason that I went to Marshall was because of Billy [Donovan],” he admits. “I grew up 45 minutes from Marshall. I used to tell all of my friends that there was no way that I was going to West Virginia or Marshall. But every thing happens for a reason and I wouldn't change nothin’.”

When Donovan left Marshall to take the job at Florida, Williams followed. The ability to get on the court immediately not only gave him even more confidence in his game—it was enough to draw the eyes of NBA scouts.

“I tell these kids nowadays, ‘Why do you want to go and sit on the bench at Kentucky for four years? Go to the Central Floridas and Marshalls so you can get minutes,’” he says. “If you're good enough, the scouts are going to find you.”

Williams was indeed good enough, and he took that swagger and talent into NBA Draft workouts. Questions surrounded him, though, both on and off the court. His truncated career at Florida lasted just 20 games before he was kicked off the team for a marijuana violation. All of his focus turned to an NBA career.

The Kings selected Williams seventh in the 1998 Draft. “I didn't really expect to go that high,” he says. “I went to these different workouts with teams and I was in the best shape of my life. I was killing everyone that they put in front of me.”

From the second he took the court with Sacramento during his lockout-shortened rookie year, Williams captivated fans and coaches alike with his unique style of play. “White Chocolate” was born, and his No. 55 Kings jersey quickly

became one of the highest selling in the League. His deep threes, filthy crossovers and endless no-look passes got basketball enthusiasts of all ages hyped. Success came, too. The Kings made the Playoffs all three seasons he spent there. The freedom that Rick Adelman gave his young lead guard was all he needed to take his game to the next level.

“It was the best thing that ever happened to me,” he says of being handed the keys from the jump in SacTown. “Rick Adelman told me the first game, ‘If you come down and throw one behind-the-back that goes out of bounds, don't worry about it. The next time, throw it with your left hand. I hold him. Shit, that's all I need to hear.’”

That brash confidence and freedom allowed us to see plays that we have never seen before in the NBA. The elbow-pass in the Rising Stars Challenge. The double crossover that led Gary Payton to try to trip Williams on his way to the basket. The fake behind-the-back hop-pass against Mike Bibby that left you puzzled as to what you had just seen. The stuff he did in games was so dynamic that the refs themselves didn't even know when to blow the whistle.

“A lot of people say it was a carry, but in '98, it wasn't a carry,” he says of his legendary move against Bibby. “That just comes from all of those hours in the gym, man. That's not the first time that I did that move, but it may have been the first time that anyone had seen it. I practiced that thing and probably did it thousands of times. Everything you seen me do, with the exception of the elbow pass, I practiced thousands of times.”

“JWill had a unique ability to do things with a basketball that most people only dream of doing, and then he'd go out there and do them in games,” former teammate and current Cavs sharpshooter Mike Miller says. “He was the best ballhandler I have ever seen.”

After three years with the Kings, Williams was dealt to the Grizzlies for Bibby, accepting a far different role in the process. The 30-foot three-pointers in transition weren't as frequent. The no-looks and behind-the-backs were still there, albeit

selectively. He had improved on his decision making to the point that he was among the top five in the League in assist-to-turnover ratio when he played in Memphis.

"When I was in Sac, we had all these guys and that's how we played, with all of the flare and flash. When I got to Memphis, my teammates weren't like C-Webb and Vlade," he says. "They were good players—we won 50 games my third year there—but you know, you have to change your style. My role was different. I had to come down and get guys the ball in positions that they could score. I couldn't do what I did in Sac."

In the summer of 2006, JDub was dealt to Miami as part of what was then the largest trade in League history, with 13 players changing to five different franchises. Playing alongside Shaq and Dwyane Wade, Williams had to change it up again. And again, success followed. He took the backseat to the aforementioned duo and improved his shot selection. The Heat would go on to win the 2006 NBA Championship.

"Winning takes care of everything. As long as you're winning, all of the other bullshit is set aside," he says. "I'm playing with Hall of Famers, man. I just sat back, accepted my role, and we got a ring. Can't nobody ever take that from me."

A stop in Orlando and a return trip to Memphis rounded out a 12-season NBA career that closed with career per-game averages of 10.5 points, 5.9 assists and 1.2 steals. Today, White Chocolate makes close to seven figures working around a month a year on overseas tours. He is a father, husband and well-off businessman who owns a handful of Five Guys restaurants.

Ask him what his proudest moments in the League were, and he won't mention that 2006 Finals victory—or anything else that took place on the court. "Just getting drafted and being able to take care of my grandmother. Just making it, really," he says with a smile. "I give my grandmother \$400 a month and she thinks it's \$4 million. Shit like that makes me happier than anything." **S**



KICKIN' THE CROSS OVER

A 6-foot 48-year-old from the south side of Chicago walks the bowels of MSG in standard NBA assistant coach attire—head-to-toe team-branded sweats, Nike sneaks, a clipboard—side-nodding politely to those who recognize him (*Nice to see you, Random MSG Employee!*) and smiling and pointing at those little more familiar (*What up, Former Knick John Wallace!*). It's a sleepy Wednesday in mid-April within the walls of the World's Most Famous Arena, ironic considering the man floating around was not only present but one of the stars during some of the building's most intense basketball moments ever.

Tim Hardaway might not resemble your average ex-pro—no unbelievable-in-person height or broad-as-a-hallway shoulders here—but when he got going on-court, he played with an intensity and toughness that gained him the adoration of his team's fans and the resentment of those who rooted for the opponents. Now, a decade-plus removed from his final NBA game, Hardaway works the sidelines for the Detroit Pistons, helping young guards develop into better young guards, mostly maintaining a low profile on the bench—a slight adjustment from his days of riling up Knicks die-hards as the starting PG of the fierce Miami

CHICAGO-BRED TIM HARDAWAY'S RIDICULOUS HANDLES AND TOUGHNESS TOOK HIM TO THE NBA, WHERE HE PLAYED FOR LEGENDARY TEAMS IN GOLDEN STATE AND MIAMI. NOW HE'S WORKING FOR THE PISTONS, HELPING YOUNG PLAYERS FOLLOW HIS FOOTSTEPS.

BY ADAM FIGMAN

Heat squads of the late-'90s.

His memories from those days live on, though. "[I remember] shooting jumpshots to shut [Knicks fans] up," he says with a smirk. "Doing the crossover to shut them up. Getting 10, 15 assists to shut them up. You want to show them love by going out there and playing the way you're

supposed to play and give them your all and give them a show. Even though they booed me, I still wanted to give them that show and show them that I understand where y'all are coming from—but I still got a job to do."

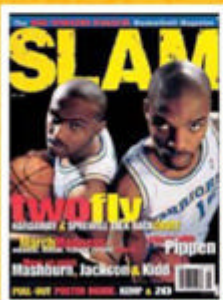
Hardaway did that job damn well, and weirdly, a decade and a half later, he's rarely listed

among those who've had an influence on the stars of today. That's doubly strange considering the waves made this season by a group that's essentially the 2.0 version of the one Hardaway once starred on.

The Golden State Warriors selected Tim Hardaway with the 14th pick of the '89 Draft. They'd chosen Mitch Richmond the year prior and Chris Mullin a few years before that, and together, the three were known as Run-TMC, a group that became heralded for its uptempo, run-and-gun style of play coached by offensive mastermind Don Nelson. Hardaway was at the helm of it all, leading a perpetual fast break—emphasis on fast—and blowing by defenders with highlight-reel ballhandling.

"To put us together, it was kind of lethal," he says, seated a few dozen feet from the MSG playing floor. "It was just fun."

Focusing on Hardaway in particular was especially fun. Years earlier he watched Pearl Washington cross somebody up during a Syracuse-Georgetown game, and then while playing college ball at UTEP, after a rough early season loss his freshman year, Hardaway decided to mess with the idea of honing a similar crossover—tinkering with the concept that you could dribble through the legs one way,



SLAM 5, MAY 1995



then come hard the other way, stepping toward the basket and leaving your defender in the dust. "I was just working on my game and I just did a move in practice," the Chicago native says. "I was like, Wow, OK. I took it to practice the next day, and developed, developed, developed. [Pearl] went one way and came back with a real low dribble and went to the hole, but I couldn't do that because that was real low, so I did it my way: between the legs and in front of you."

"With a guy like that, if you run up on him, he'll go by you," says Gary Payton, who matched

up against Hardaway for many years. "If you back off him and go underneath [picks], he could shoot. It was a little different with him, because he had both. You didn't know how to guard him."

"[The Warriors] could put Tim in the post and in close range and do the crossover in the post area—that was tough to defend," says fellow '90s PG Kenny Anderson. "He'd be down under the basket and getting a lot of points that way, so you have to be able to defend the post a little. He could do it all, man."

While the still-YouTube-able highlights piled up and the

Run-TMC Warriors dominated the regular seasons of the early '90s, they never found true post-season success. They lost in the second round in '91, then the first round in '92, then missed the Playoffs altogether in '93.

"You need a big man to cover other big men," Hardaway says. "We just didn't have a big man that we could go to down-low who could score for us. It was hard for us during the Playoffs, but during the season, you couldn't guard us. If we were in the NCAA Tournament, we would've won it all [laughs]. But we needed a big-time low-post

scorer, and we didn't have that."

By 1993, the Dubs dealt Mitch Richmond away for Billy Owens in a move Nelson would later call "the one regret I have of my career," and then Hardaway, who had made All-Star Games in '91, '92 and '93 (averaging 20+ points and 10 or so assists throughout those years), missed the entire '93-94 season with a torn ACL. Mind you, this is before the medical advancements of today. The idea that a player could miss an entire season with a knee injury and bounce back to be the same player wasn't quite unheard of but was certainly

"I HAVEN'T SEEN ANYBODY REALLY DEVELOP A CROSSOVER LIKE I HAD IT. IT'S A CARRY, SOMETIMES. MINE WAS JUST, BOOM BAM, AND I WENT TO THE HOLE."

more unlikely than today.

Hardaway found a way, though. While sitting out the season and rehabbing, he returned to the Chi, where he once watched his streetball legend of a father play while sitting on a basketball alongside the local south side courts. As a child, he studied Chi Town hoops heroes like Isiah Thomas, Maurice Cheeks, Mark Aguirre and Terry Cummings, learning the moves and steadily acquiring the toughness needed to succeed on those courts. He attended Carver HS, skipping out on the national tournaments during the hot summers in favor of playing outside against the aforementioned guys, among many other pros, who would all show up to rec leagues and streetball games to face real competition.

Once, before Hardaway made it to the L, a young but NBA-proven Michael Jordan came to the Illinois Institute of Technology to face up against him in a summer league game. According to Hardaway, MJ dropped 65, while the point guard scored 63 (Jordan's team won by 2, according to a 2003 account of the tale in the *Chicago Reader*), but it was then that Hardaway gained the confidence needed to keep pushing. "[MJ] just happened to show up," he says. "Once everybody found out he was there, it was fire hazardous, but everybody was there. It was tit for tat, tit for tat. Right then and there I knew I had a chance to make the NBA."

And yet, returning home to Chicago after tearing his ACL and sitting out a full season wasn't so much about studying up on the greats or taking on local legends—it was about

going back to his roots, to the people and places who made him the person and player he had become. Most NBAers don't get a chance to truly recalibrate in the midst of their careers, but Hardaway sought (and found) just that. "I brought it back to the streets, back to my roots," he says. "I understood what I needed to do and how I needed to get back. [My friends in Chicago] kept the pressure on and kept talking to me, talking smack to me—giving me confidence but tearing me down, so I could come back and be my old self."

He would indeed eventually get back to his old self, but not right away. Rick Adelman replaced Don Nelson in Golden State, and a young guard named Latrell Sprewell became the face (and excitement) of the franchise [You may recall Timmy and Spre together on the cover of our fifth issue—Ed.].

Hardaway had a very public falling out with Adelman, though, and in February '96, he was shipped to Miami with Chris Gatling in a deadline deal for Bimbo Coles and Kevin Willis.

The move fully revitalized his career, as he became an All-Star in '97 and '98, and linked with Alonzo Mourning to lead an in-your-face Miami squad that battled Eastern Conference foes like the Chicago Bulls, Indiana Pacers, Charlotte Hornets and, of course, the Knicks.

"We became sort of the Bad Boys of the '90s," says Pat Riley, who coached the Heat and sparked the rivalry by leaving New York for Miami in 1995.

And Hardaway, at 6-foot-nothing and with an awkward jumpshot that didn't look like it'd

ever go in but so often did, only fueled that fire. "He's a closer," Riley says. "If the game is going to go down to the final shot or the final possession, then it's going to be in [his] hands. [He's] going to make the decision."

"I think I had my most fun, with the most intense, most gratifying basketball, with the Heat," Hardaway says. "Great battles. Frustrating at times, but great battles all the time. That's what it's supposed to be. It's supposed to be non-stop, in-your-face, talking-smack, hard-nosed, and that's what it was."

Like the early-'90s Warriors, the late-'90s Heat never earned a title, and years later, Hardaway would retire without a ring. He bounced around the League, playing in Dallas and Denver before calling it quits in 2003 after a quick stint with Indiana.

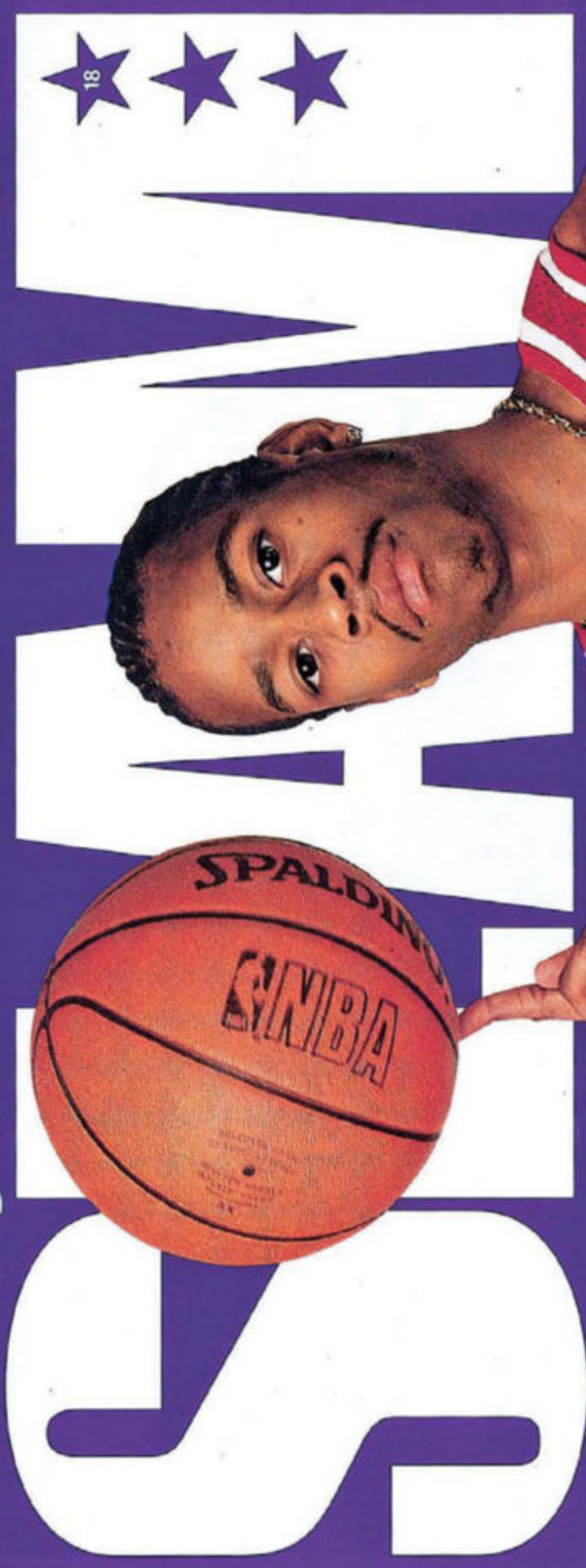
He did some scouting for the Heat in the mid-'00s ("I should have just put him on the [coaching] staff," Riley laughs. "I don't know if he was interested."), then got a call in 2014 about an open spot on the Pistons bench. Now, young guards—Brandon Jennings, Reggie Jackson, Kentavious Caldwell-Pope, Spencer Dinwiddie—come to him for advice. The Pistons are still young and have a long way to go before they're competing on any serious level, but Hardaway sounds happy to push the young cats however he can. There's just one thing he will absolutely not be passing down.

"I haven't seen anybody really develop a crossover like I had it," he says. "It's a carry, sometimes. Mine was just, boom, bam, and I went to the hole."

And like that, he was gone. \$



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Eastern Conference, 1980



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Lakers, '83-84



Clyde Drexler
Trail Blazers, '83-84



Magic Johnson
Lakers, '84-85



Michael Jordan
Bulls, '84-85



Muggsy Bogues
Hornets, '92-93



Moses Malone
Sixers, '93-94



Hakeem Olajuwon
Rockets, '93-94



Shaquille O'Neal
Magic, '93-94



Penny Hardaway
Magic, '94-95



Clyde Drexler
Rockets, '96-97



Patrick Ewing
Knicks, '96-97



Tim Hardaway
Heat, '96-97



Allen Iverson
Sixers, '96-97



Mark Jackson
Pacers, '96-97



Steve Nash
Suns, '96-97



Shaquille O'Neal
Lakers, '96-97



Bryant Reeves
Grizzlies, '96-97



Jalen Rose
Pacers, '96-97



Steve Nash
Hawks, '96-97



Kobe Bryant
Western Conference, 1998



Vince Carter
Raptors, '98-99



Vince Carter
Raptors, '98-99



Tim Duncan
Spurs, '98-99



Grant Hill
Pistons, '98-99



Frazier
'72-73



Phil Jackson
Knicks, '72-73



Earl Monroe
Knicks, '72-73



Julius Erving
Nets, '73-74



Kareem Abdul-Jabbar
Western Conference, 1980



Jordan
'84-85



James Worthy
Lakers, '84-85



Larry Bird
Celtics, '85-86



Drazen Petrovic
Nets, '90-91



Dikembe Mutombo
Nuggets, '91-92



Hardaway
'94-95



Mitch Richmond
Kings, '94-95



Shawn Kemp
SuperSonics, '95-96



Gary Payton
SuperSonics, '95-96



Shareef Abdul-Rahim,
Grizzlies, '96-97



Jackson
'96-97



Kevin Johnson
Suns, '96-97



Michael Jordan
Eastern Conference, 1996



Karl Malone
Jazz, '96-97



Alonzo Mourning
Heat, '96-97



Smith
'96-97



John Stockton
Jazz, '96-97



Allen Iverson
Sixers, '97-98



Scottie Pippen
Bulls, '97-98



Scottie Pippen
Bulls, '97-98



Hill
'98-99



Larry Johnson
Knicks, '98-99



David Robinson
Spurs, '98-99



Latrell Sprewell
Knicks, '98-99



Yao Ming
Rockets, '02-03



RISING SUN

Just about 48 hours before boarding a flight to New York City, DeAndre Ayton is staring out the window of Maritza's Mexican Food Restaurant into the parking lot when the adorning curtains begin to distract him. The family-owned restaurant, which is located in the northern San Diego neighborhood of Clairemont, is a classic old-school Mexican joint with a décor that reflects the culture's rich artwork and colorful patterns—visible on the walls, as well as on the curtain hanging over Ayton's left shoulder. Staying true to its vintage feel, the spot features a vintage Coca-Cola menu board filled with plastic black and red removable letters and numbers. And it wouldn't be old-school if it didn't have a paying system that only accepts cash.

But for the 16-year-old, it's the distinctiveness of the curtains that piques his curiosity and leads to an array of questions about the locale to his head coach and guardian Zack Jones. As Jones begins to explain that the place hasn't changed its look since the '90s and that Maritza's brothers are cooking in the back while she handles the counter, Ayton seems to be really into the details.

"Wow, that's crazy," he says, leaning back on his chair in awe while facing the kitchen. "Never heard of that."

The conversation and overall dining out is a nice change of pace and break from the intense basketball chatter that's about to be the main focus tonight (and over

Having left his family behind in the Bahamas to pursue his hoop dreams in San Diego, 6-10 16-year-old DEANDRE AYTON HAS EMERGED AS ONE OF THE TOP PROSPECTS IN THE WORLD.

**WORDS FRANKLYN CALLE
PORTRAITS ATIBA JEFFERSON**

the upcoming weekend) when the 6-10 rising junior heads over to practice to prepare for his 2015 summer youth circuit debut in Ardsley, NY, during Memorial Day weekend.

Ayton's much-anticipated participation in Session 3 of the Under Armour Association, the brand's elite league for its sponsored summer travel teams, will be the talk of the weekend for the national recruiting analysts in attendance looking to catch his return to the hardwood after sitting out the beginning of spring nursing a fractured right kneecap he suffered in February.

As he finishes his chicken quesadilla and carne asada burrito, the 16-year-old nods his head in recognition of the importance of the upcoming weekend trip to the Big Apple.

"I'll be ready," he says. "I've been getting ready every

day this week, just going at it hard the last couple of weeks. Coach Zack and I have been talking about it. Like, don't do too much. It's not an open period, so if you feel some way we can lay off it a bit because we have a big summer coming up. It's just about how my knee is going to feel. I'm not worried about the competition. Just need to take care of things on our end."

Ayton's journey to becoming one of the top prospects in America (and many would argue he's the top prospect, regardless of class) began in the Bahamas in the summer of 2011 when he attended the Jeff Rodgers Basketball Camp. There, he turned heads with his play. Raw but displaying unlimited upside, he ended up as the talk of a camp he initially had no interest in attending.

"I didn't really want to go at first, but my mom convinced me to go," he recalls of the Rodgers Camp, which annually features NBA players as instructors. "I didn't really watch basketball back home. I just played a lot of soccer barefooted. That was my first sport. They had the basketball games on TV, but I just wasn't interested."

By the end of the camp, his mother was already being approached by Bahamians now living in the United States with ties to American schools. Relocating to the US seemed like the next logical step, and Ayton quickly realized that maybe he should give hoops a serious shot.

Later that summer he began visiting potential schools to attend. Among them was one in Houston, where he says he got the unique opportunity of meeting Hakeem Olajuwon.

"He told me to just keep working on my footwork and stay motivated," Ayton says. "I began watching his videos. He was the first guy I really watched."

The family opted not to pursue the Houston school, eventually agreeing on Balboa City School in San Diego. Ayton moved to Southern California that September and began classes immediately as a seventh grader. Located across the street from the Balboa Park that's home to the world famous San Diego Zoo, the private school is remarkably small, with a cumulative student body of about 120 in grades K-12, leaving many classroom sizes in the single digits.





a couple of Mexican universities.

"During my years at Horizon, there were always kids in the community that wanted to go to school there, but because of CIF restrictions they never could," says Jones. "I always felt like if a kid wanted that opportunity and experience, why not provide it for him? So when we put this program together with Balboa, we decided not to go the CIF route. We wanted to give kids who wanted to come in and play at a high level the opportunity to do so."

During Ayton's seventh, eighth and ninth grades, Balboa City simply played a few games at a local YMCA league during the winter months/regular season while the majority of time was dedicated to skill development. Meanwhile, camps and the summer grassroots circuit were utilized for exposure.

Despite not playing a single minute of high school basketball as a freshman, Ayton entered last summer as the top prospect in the Class of 2017, all due to his showings in the summer circuit. It's this kind of unorthodox journey that makes his emergence as a blue chipper in America as unique of a basketball story as it gets. Here is a kid from the Bahamas who only began taking up hoops seriously after participating in a camp that his mother talked him into attending at the age of 12, and who has quietly risen into one of the most coveted recruits over the past four years in a school that basically didn't even have an athletic program when he enrolled. The basketball program at BCS has essentially grown around Ayton. If everything goes according to plan, it may very well be known one day as the Program That DeAndre Ayton Built.

Last summer, he was one of only five rising sophomores to be invited to the LeBron James Skills Academy. Yes, despite not having any formal high school basketball experience under his belt. And it didn't take long before he and the NBA superstar connected—on an alley.

"LeBron threw me that alley-oop in front of those NBA scouts," Ayton recalls excitedly. "He threw it pretty high and so I went up there and got it. I said, I'm catching this one. He

"I told my mom I was on a mission at age 12. I knew what I wanted. I knew what my mom and family were going through.

I CAME OVER HERE FOR BUSINESS—TO WORK."

"I told my mom I was on a mission at age 12," says Ayton. "I knew what I wanted. I knew what my mom and family were going through. I came over here for business—to work."

BCS isn't the kind of place you'd initially think the top prospect in the nation would call home. The school is so small it doesn't even have a gym, and it actually didn't even have a high school basketball team until this past season. Despite being around since 1991, the school didn't even have a sports department until 2012, when Jones brought his Force Sports Foundation to operate as the athletics program there. He and his partner Ryan Stone founded Force Sports in

2010 as a recreational program for kids in the San Diego community. Jones, a native of Washington, DC, who played college ball at San Diego State, has been around the basketball prep scene in the area for a long time.

He was the head coach at Horizon HS when Milwaukee Bucks forward Jared Dudley helped lead the school to back-to-back state championships in 2000 and 2001. It's a record that still stands today, as no other school in San Diego has ever repeated consecutively as state champs.

Aside from not having its own gymnasium and a sports program that peculiarly began after Ayton's arrival, BCS also

isn't under the CIF (California Interscholastic Federation) umbrella and thus can't schedule regular-season games against most other programs in the state. The advantages, though, are that it doesn't have to abide by any of the restrictions the CIF imposes. Therefore, it can hold practices year-round and play a national schedule. Among the top national players they competed against last year were Thon Maker's Orangeville Prep of Canada, Terrance Ferguson's Prime Prep of Texas, Udoka Azubuike's Potter's House Christian of Florida and Josh Jackson's Prolific Prep of Napa, CA. The program also went south of the border to play





DeAndre with his coach and guardian, Zack Jones

“I USED TO GOOGLE MY NAME AND SEE NO RESULTS.

And I wondered, Why is my name not up here, too? I told myself my name was going to be there in a positive way, and it's finally here.”

mushed me a little bit, a little pound on the head. I felt super hype. I didn't want to show too much. I kept it in until I got back to the hotel room to start shouting.”

But it was his play back home in August that caught the attention of the college bball world. He suited up for a summer league exhibition team called the Providence Storm in the nation's capital of Nassau. The squad was mostly composed of college players and a couple of overseas pros. Ayton was the only high schooler on the team. Their opponent on August 15? The UNC Tar Heels. Behind 17 points and 18 rebounds from the teen wonder, the Storm pulled off a shocker by defeating North Carolina 84-83. And yes, UNC had their regular players on the court that night.

“The coach at UNC was pretty mad,” Ayton says with a smile. “He was yelling, ‘Somebody stop him!’ He was pretty mad and I loved it.”

He returned to BCS last fall

as a sophomore for his high school season debut (also the inaugural season for BCS), where he averaged 21.1 points, 16 rebounds and 3.8 blocks. He shot 67 percent from the floor while finishing with a double-double in all but one of his 22 games. His first season was cut short after that kneecap fracture in February, which caused him to miss the last month and half of play.

Widely regarded as a young Kevin Garnett, Ayton has an NBA-bound body to go along with a versatility and athleticism that isn't found on too many young ballers his size. He can put the ball on the floor and step out for long jumpers.

“I think he's a little more athletic, has a better jump shot and can handle the ball better,” says Jones of Ayton's game, comparing him to a young Big Ticket. “I think he's a little ahead of the game than KG was coming out of high school.”

Not only are their games similar—so is their intensity and



competitiveness.

“I don't like to lose,” says Ayton. “When I play, I don't like to see people win—I get jealous and angry. I want to take it from you because I want to be the top guy. I want to be that guy. So that's when my competitiveness kicks in and that's when I start to dominate.”

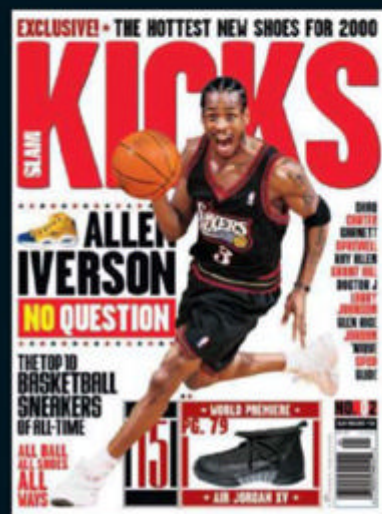
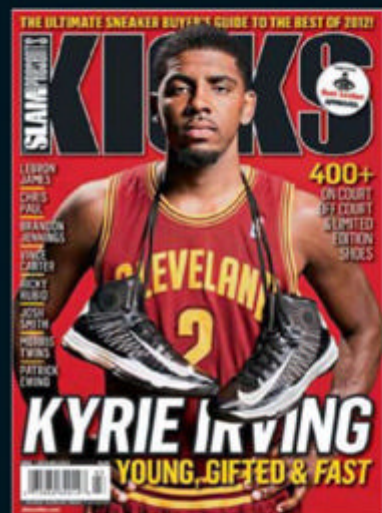
After arriving in New York on Thursday night, Ayton and his Supreme Court travel team waited until 10 p.m. on Friday to finally get on the court. When they did, despite his timing not being completely there after returning from his knee injury, Ayton easily dropped 15 points and 15 rebounds in a 2-point loss. Carrying that momentum

to the next morning, he then posted a 28-point and 13-rebound outing on his way to a victory. He ended the weekend on Sunday with 18 points, 19 boards and 5 blocks while falling short to the Houston Defenders. Not a bad weekend for someone who hadn't played in a basketball game in months.

“The reason I wear No. 0 is because I came from nothing,” says Ayton. “If I stay hungry and humbled, it will turn into an actual valuable digit one day.

“I used to Google my name and see no results,” he continues, “and I wondered, Why is my name not up here too? I told myself my name was going to be there in a positive way—and it's finally here.” **\$**

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ROCK'EM

TWO DECADES AFTER HOUSTON WON ITS SECOND STRAIGHT TITLE WITH ITS BIGGEST STARS WEARING LESSER-KNOWN SNEAKER BRANDS, THE WARRIORS ARE TRYING TO DO THE SAME.

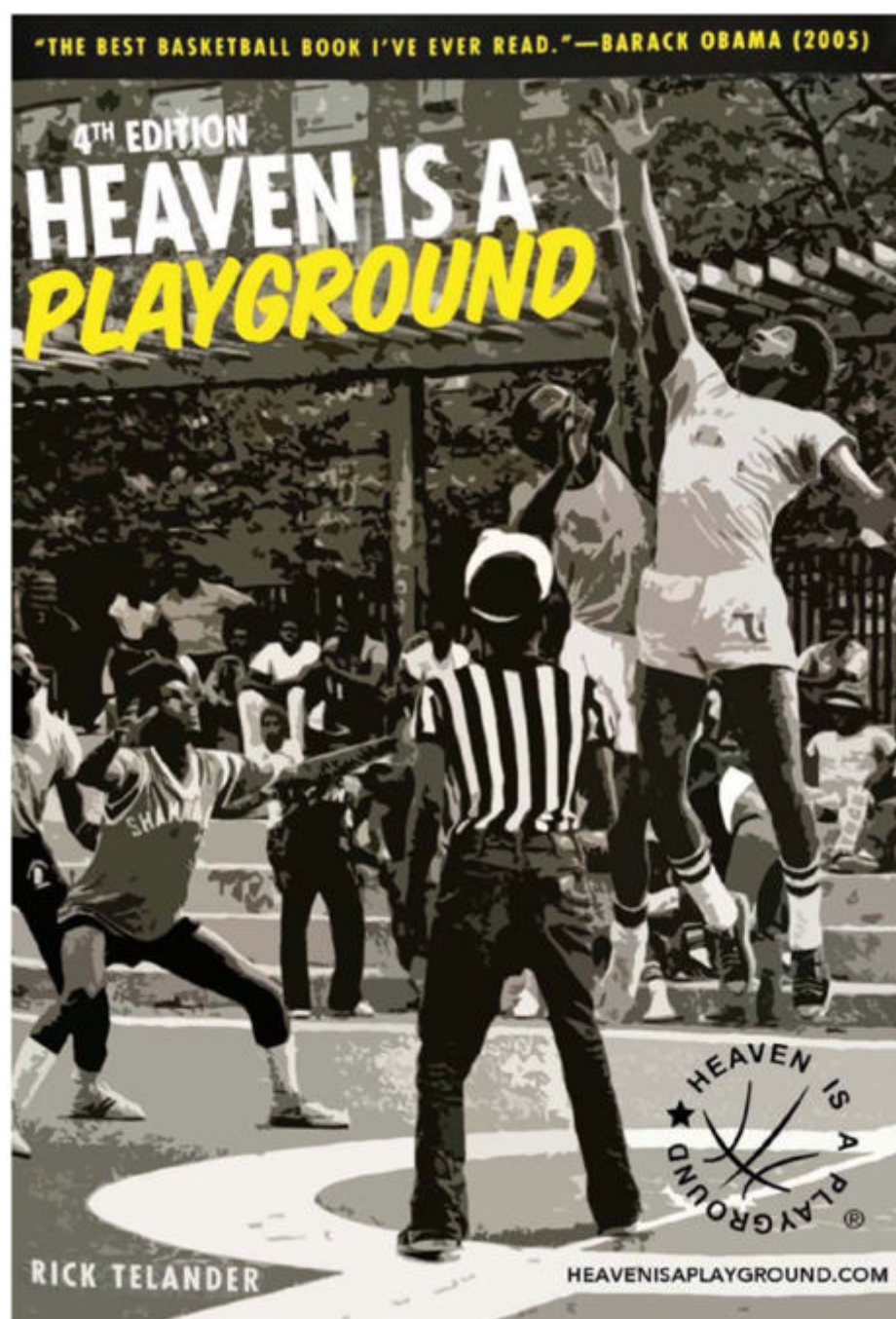
The 1994-95 Houston Rockets won an improbable second NBA title on the strength of a Herculean Finals performance from Hakeem Olajuwon, who averaged 32.8 ppg, 11.5 rpg, 2.0 bpg and 2.0 spg in the series and won Finals MVP for a second straight time.

Twenty years later, if the Golden State Warriors win the 2015 title, they'll have something in common with those Rockets—they're sneaker underdogs.

Back in '95, Houston faced an Orlando Magic team with Shaquille O'Neal and his signature Reebok Shaq Attaq 4s, Penny Hardaway's Nike Flight Ones and Nick Anderson in Air Jordan Xs. But Olajuwon dominated that Finals in his signature Spalding "The Dream." (A year earlier, he rocked LA Gear.) Fellow HOFer Clyde Drexler—acquired in a mid-season trade with Portland—put up 21.5 ppg, 9.5 rpg and 6.8 apg in the Finals lacing up Avia 910s. The Glide had turned down Nike for smaller brands like ROOS in the past, too.

Likewise, Stephen Curry and Klay Thompson rep brands that are more Davids than Goliaths. With an MVP season in the bag and an international fan base growing exponentially, Steph has instantly made Under Armour a major player with the explosion of his first signature, the Curry One. Thompson is making inroads in Asia with Chinese brand ANTA, wearing the KT Fire since February. Their Finals foes include Cavs superstars LeBron James and Kyrie Irving, two of Nike's biggest endorsers.

Of course, plenty of G-State's key players wear adidas or Nike. On that "Clutch City" team, Kenny Smith and Robert Horry wore Nike, and Mario Elie and Sam Cassell were Reebok dudes. But the team leaders had unique kicks. Since Hakeem did it, Finals MVPs with under-the-radar sneaker deals have been few and far between. Chauncey Billups wore AND 1 in '04 and Dwyane Wade rocked Converse in '06, but just as the L has been dominated by a handful of teams over the last two decades, so have a small number of powerhouse brands been center stage.—**ABE SCHWADRON**



WANNA BE A BALLER?

HAL PASTNER'S HOUSTON-BASED **BIGFOOT HOOPS** IS HELPING THOUSANDS OF KIDS—ELITE AND OTHERWISE—ENJOY COMPETITIVE SUMMER BASKETBALL.

WORDS **FRANKLYN CALLE**

On this hot and humid Saturday afternoon in late April, basketball excitement has taken over the widespread metropolis of Houston. Yes, the hometown Rockets took a commanding 3-0 series lead over the state rival Dallas Mavericks in the first round of the NBA Playoffs last night, but no, that's not why literally thousands of adolescents and adults are walking around the city draped in basketball gear.

Flooding hotels, diners and gyms throughout the city for the weekend, these hoop aficionados are too busy trying to work their way through their own respective tournament seeding and brackets to be too caught up in the League's post-season action.

As it turns to evening, the lobby of the M13 Center parallels a rush-hour gridlock, as kids, parents and coaches bump shoulder-to-shoulder, barely covering any ground in their attempts to walk either into the gym, out of the building or into the main hallway on the right, where a wall filled with white paper seems to be the center of attention and the major culprit of it all. The wall holds unfinished handwritten brackets. And as the event

approaches its last few pool play games, this wall becomes ever more important, with teams taking turns to gather in front of it.

Squeezing his way through traffic, trying to balance his coffee in one hand and answer his phone with the other, is the inimitable Hal Pastner. As president of Bigfoot Hoops, which organizes and operates national youth travel team tournaments, such as the Kingwood Classic taking place in H-Town on this particular weekend, he's being briefed on a team that has yet to show up to Court 4 and whether they should forfeit the game. The showcase is hosting close to 350 teams from around the country on 29 courts scattered throughout an array of facilities in the Houston area. Approximately 150 teams were waitlisted and turned away after many programs waited too late to register and not enough courts were reserved to accommodate the last-minute surge.

With bracket play later in the evening and NCAA restrictions on how late games can start, Pastner's decision has delicate implications. "No forfeit," he responds. "We'll wait a little longer. I don't like

to do it, but let's wait."

He unnoticeably walks past a group of teenagers who just finished up their game and are planning where to catch some grub next. Little do so many of the young hoopsters hoping to one day play college ball know that he is the father of Memphis head coach Josh Pastner, as well as one of the prime figures that helped make summer youth travel team basketball the Little League Baseball of today's generation of athletes.

Having spent his youth working the bench as a ball boy for the Philadelphia 76ers in the early '60s, Hal's history with the game includes having access to one of basketball's most legendary players, Wilt Chamberlain. He still vividly recalls listening to the radio in 1962 with his father when at the 32-point mark of the Hall of Famer's legendary 100-point game, he decided to reel-to-reel tape the remaining minutes of the historic game.

But as he went off to Rider College (now University), Pastner stepped away from the game. After college, he began working in sales and marketing for a manufacturing company in the Philly

area, eventually moving to the company's headquarters in Houston a few years later. But in the early '80s, as his firstborn, Josh, began to show interest in the sport, Hal decided to coach in the local Y League for the fun of it and to spend time with his son.

One day, Hal told Josh that with the Y League having ended and summer on the horizon, it was time to look for a soccer club to join. But the future DI head coach, who was only 8 at the time, wanted more hoops action during the summer as well, and only that. And so the Kingwood Stars club team was born. Hal put together a team that summer for Josh composed of players from northeast Houston. With AAU basketball still nonexistent, they simply looked for teams in the community to compete against. Soon after, the roster began growing to feature players from all over Houston, and thus a couple of years later Hal ended up renaming it the Houston Hoops.

The program quickly drew some of the top talent in the area. In the early years, its members included NFL players Marcus Spears, Martellus Bennett, Robert Ferguson and David Boston, while its NBA



Kyle Manary is one of many coaches in Pastner's Houston Hoops family.

PUNKS



alumni list includes Rashard Lewis, Daniel Gibson, Stephen Jackson, TJ Ford, Emeka Okafor, Kendrick Perkins and most recently 2015 NBA Draft prospects Justice Winslow and Kelly Oubre.

"I guess it was in my DNA from my old days with the 76ers," says Pastner of returning to basketball in the '80s. (He stopped coaching the team in the early '90s.) "I got away from it, but I guess I just had a deep hidden passion for the game. So I did it, as it kept me close to my son and then the other kids became family, too."

His part-time involvement with the sport became a full-time endeavor in 2000 after the manufacturing company that employed him was sold to an owner who laid him off. Unemployed, his wife suggested that he should consider going into sports. Having experience running a youth travel team, there was only one area that he knew he was sort of familiar with.

"I said, I'll try doing tournaments," recalls Pastner, who subsequently founded Vision Sports. "I didn't know what I was doing, but I took my business acumen from the past in working with all these companies, my love for the kids, my love for basketball, and my organization and marketing skills, and I put them together and learned on the go."

The timing of it all couldn't have been more fortuitous. The NCAA had just begun allowing a "live period" in April, a college recruiting term used to describe a span of days in which college coaches are allowed to physically attend high school tournaments and camps. Each high school state association had to approve the events, and Texas became nearly the only one to do so at first. Thus, when Pastner launched the Kingwood Classic in April of 2001, it became the rare event where college coaches could evaluate prep prospects from the sidelines in the spring. Every youth travel team wanted to be there because college coaches were going to be there and every college coach wanted to be there because they knew the players

were going to be there.

Among those who partook in the inaugural showcase were Perkins, Marcus Williams and Trevor Ariza. As the years went on, the Kingwood Classic became a staple of grassroots basketball, drawing the top players from across the country, including the likes of Kevin Love (opposite, top left), Gerald Green, Mike Conley, Monta Ellis, Rajon Rondo, Paul Millsap, Kyle Lowry, Derrick Rose and Blake Griffin, among hundreds of others. One year, the event hosted 750 teams, in what translated to over 2,500 games on 72 courts in 48 hours—with some games finishing well past 1 a.m.

"Everyone is talking about [how] summer basketball doesn't focus on fundamentals," says Pastner. "But they're just focused on the 10 or 20 guys going to the NBA. What about the tens of thousands who want to play on a weekend? From the little third grader on, it's about keeping them busy and off the streets. Giving them something they love. Basketball is a great outlet to keep the kids involved and away from the peer pressure with so much

Pastner (with Wilt) was a part of basketball history in Philadelphia.



different mission. With the nation's truly elite high school-age players—including Pastner's own Houston Hoops team—in Kentucky on this particular weekend for the Nike EYBL or the Under Armour Association, Houston was full of kids who simply love the game and wanted to hoop for the fun of it.

The Las Vegas Classic is an exception, taking place after the sneaker companies' circuit and as a result attracting some of the country's elite talent, with Chicago's Mac Irvin Fire winning the premier division bracket last year.

Staying true to its goals of providing a fun and engaging experience for all its participants, a team can lose all its pool play games but still win a championship since everyone goes into a championship bracket—allowing kids of lesser levels to play in different divisions.

And while most college coaches were at the sneaker circuits, local coaches from Texas and Louisiana and even New Jersey made their way this year, "looking for sleepers," as one college coach put it.

"I DIDN'T KNOW WHAT I WAS DOING, BUT I TOOK MY LOVE FOR THE KIDS AND BASKETBALL, AND MY ORGANIZATION AND MARKETING SKILLS, AND I PUT THEM TOGETHER AND LEARNED ON THE GO."

going on in society today."

Vision Sports expanded out West, launching the Las Vegas Main Event in July 2004. It went from 300 teams to over 700, with Kevin Durant (opposite, bottom left), Ty Lawson and Spencer Hawes among those playing. Pastner already had some tourney experience in the desert after taking over operations for the Mae Fisher Easter Classic in April 2003 once she passed away.

In 2007, someone came along with an offer and Vision Sports was purchased. Within a year, Pastner says the Kingwood Classic and the Main Event went under, as the new operators underestimated the complexities of successfully

running such events—logistics, etc. The sale had a three-year non-compete clause, leaving him out of the tournament world until December 1 of 2010. And on that exact day, Pastner and his old crew were back.

Pastner and his staff kicked off in April 2011 with the H-Town Classic, this time under the company Bigfoot Hoops. The Main Event, which was rebranded as the Las Vegas Classic, made its return that July. The Kingwood Classic returned in 2013, and just like the first time, it didn't take long for the tourneys to quickly evolve. Last year, the Las Vegas Classic featured 850 teams on 49 courts, which Pastner believes was the largest NCAA certified

live period event ever.

For this year's Classic, Bigfoot Hoops, which opts to pay its entire staff instead of using volunteers as most other youth showcases do, already has international entries from teams in Australia, New Zealand, Norway, Spain, the West Indies, Mexico, Canada and the Philippines, and expects to surpass last year's historic numbers.

Yet this time around, the summer youth circuit landscape has changed. The sneaker companies have come in and created exclusive leagues for their respective sponsored teams, marginalizing those who don't have national prospects on their rosters. Thus, the Kingwood Classic now serves a

The Kingwood Classic, along with many of Bigfoot's other tourneys, such as the Big Cup Houston and Orlando Summer Classic, have become a reminder that summer basketball should be just as much about fun for the thousands of non-elite players as it is business for others in search of the elite few.

"When people say summer ball is ruining the game, I say, No, summer ball is fantastic for the game," says Pastner. "Look at all these kids playing. It's not just about the 10 athletes going into the NBA—it's about America. It's about giving kids a chance to play in an organized tournament with a positive atmosphere that's beneficial to all those involved." ■

PUNKS

SET IT OFF

ASIA DURR WILL ARRIVE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF LOUISVILLE WITH A TON OF HYPE RESTING ON HER SHOULDERS—NOT THAT SHE SEEMS TO MIND MUCH

WORDS **FRANKLYN CALLE** ★ PORTRAITS **DIWANG VALDEZ**

As she begins packing for her arrival to the University of Louisville in three days, Asia Durr can't help but reminisce over the journey that led her to this point. When the 5-11 guard arrives on campus for summer classes, she'll be doing so as arguably the highest-rated women's college basketball freshman in the land.

No one put a ball in her hands, though—she took it.

Durr still vividly remembers how, at the age of 3, with her father training her 8-year-old brother for an upcoming game, she decided to literally take the rock—and her future—into her own hands.

"I took the ball, and my dad said I started bouncing it and

doing crossovers and going between my legs," she recalls. "And then he said, 'Do it again!' I just kept doing it. Basically, I just took over the time he was trying to practice with my brother and then he started practicing with me. My brother wasn't too happy."

And as easy as she made it look back then, she's done the same ever since, especially at St. Pius X in Atlanta over the past four years, where she comes away with an array of records and national accolades.

As a sophomore, the future Cardinal led her team to the 3A state championship after averaging 21.2 points, 6.8 rebounds and 2.6 steals for the 30-3 Golden Lions. Her junior year, she led St. Pius X to a second

consecutive 3A state title and another 30-3 record, this time averaging 24.4 ppg, 7.1 rpg and 2.5 spg. She was ultimately named the 2014 Gatorade Georgia Player of the Year.

This past season, while falling short of three-peating after a loss in the state quarterfinals, Durr posted 33.3 points and 6.4 rebounds per game (while shooting better than 50 percent from the floor and 46 percent from behind the arc) on her way to repeating as Gatorade state POY.

She graduated as the school's all-time leading scorer, male or female, with 2,764 points.

"It was tough knowing that it was my last year of high school basketball and I'll never be able to put on that jersey

again," says Durr of almost three-peating. "But you can't win everything and sometimes you just have to remember how blessed you are."

The two-time Georgia Miss Basketball is starting at Louisville this summer in not-so-ideal circumstances. While running in late April, she pulled her groin and figured it wasn't anything that stretching wouldn't heal. A couple of weeks later, while at the USA Basketball U19 tryouts in Colorado Springs, she aggravated the injury and returned home for a check-up. An MRI revealed small tissue damage; she was ordered no sports activities for a minimum of six weeks.

So now, halfway through the shut-down and days away from moving into the dorms, the All-American guard known for her craftiness with the ball and ability to light up the scoreboard will have to wait a little longer than the rest of her counterparts before beginning workouts as a collegian.

Touted by many as the best player to come out of the Peach State since Maya Moore, Durr knows her role in all the hype.

"It's been fun and kind of overwhelming at the same time," she says of the lofty expectations bestowed on her upon her arrival to the U of L. "I can't wait to go out there and prove myself. Sometimes you just have to go out there, do what you do, have fun and just tune all of that out. It's all part of it."





*"I can't
wait to go
out there
and prove
myself."*

PUNKS

UPPER

ALLONZO TRIER
Henderson (NV) Findlay, 6-5, G

Within hours after his graduation on May 14, Allonzo Trier was on a flight on his way to Tucson. Only thing was, the first session of summer classes at the University of Arizona was still more than three weeks away.

"I'm probably the only college freshman that's on campus at any school so it's given me time to get a head start, develop and take the time to learn these things now," says Trier after a workout in late May. "I think it will allow me to be more comfortable when the season starts."

It is this kind of dedication that's driven the Seattle native to become arguably the top pure scorer in the Class of 2015 and the all-time leading scorer for Nike's prestigious EYBL. With Trier, it's never been about complacency, only moving on to the next challenge. Take his high school résumé: he moved from Washington to Oklahoma and played for a couple of homeschool teams his freshman and sophomore years before transferring to Montrose Christian in Maryland as a junior, where he averaged 25.5 points and led them to the National Christian School Athletic Association championship. For his senior season, he moved to Nevada to join national powerhouse Findlay.

"I had to continuously prove myself in different areas instead of just staying in one place," says Trier, who was the feature of a *New York Times Magazine* cover story as a sixth grader. "I continuously challenged myself by trying to step up to the highest level of competition I could in order to prove that I'm an elite player." —FRANKLYN CALLE



BRIGHT LIGHTS, BIG CITY

MARCUS LOVETT JR Chicago (IL) Morgan Park, 6-0, G

In basketball, if people see that you're going places, then you're bound to receive a nickname. But in Marcus LoVett's case, he took that nickname and knew exactly which place to go.

"The style of game I have, I think I can excite a lot of fans, especially in a place like Madison Square Garden," says LoVett aka "Bright Lights" of his decision to attend St. John's in the fall. "Located in New York, that's a huge market and I like to play in big stages. I knew New York was the biggest stage for me."

The 6-0 scoring machine got the nickname last year for his ability to put on a show with his elusive ballhandling skill set, becoming a crowd-pleaser since his freshman year and the subject of multi-million-viewed YouTube videos.

In 9th grade, he led the nation in scoring among freshmen with 31.7 points per game during the season and 35.8 points during the playoffs, winning Southern Section Division V-A and Liberty League Player of the Year at Providence HS in Burbank (CA). After returning to Providence as a sophomore and moving to San Gabriel Academy for his junior season, he transferred to Chicago's Morgan Park for his senior year, averaging approximately 25 points, 8 rebounds and 7 assists, leading the Mustangs to a 21-5 record and third place in the state tournament.

Now preparing to call the bright lights of MSG his home floor, LoVett, who says Allen Iverson and Pistol Pete are his two all-time favorite NBA guards to study, only has one goal.

"I'm just trying to live up to [the name] and do what I need to do to keep it going." —FRANKLYN CALLE



Jon Lopez/Nike Basketball; Kelly Kline; Trevor Paulhus; Kelly Kline; Kelly Kline



BASKETBALL DIARY MALIK NEWMAN

What's up, world? It's Tuesday, June 2 and I'm officially moving in to campus tonight for the start of summer school. Tomorrow will be orientation—they'll just show me around campus, like where my classes will be at, then I'll get my student ID and probably will work out later at night. Then Thursday is when we start classes. I'll be attending both summer sessions so I'll be here until August. It's a beautiful campus and only about an hour and 45 minutes away from home.

The place I'll be staying at for the summer is like a dorm, but then the one I'll be staying at in the fall, it's more of like an apartment.

I'm really excited about it. It's a new chapter in my life—one that I think will be very fun. As a kid growing up, that's something you always looked forward to. So I think it's a big accomplishment to add to my list of accolades.

I never thought college would get here so soon. I just graduated from high school like a week ago and here I am moving to college already.

For this summer I'm just excited to learn what college is all about and just see the blueprint of everything so that when August comes I won't be surprised.

This is the first time I'll basically be living away from home on my own. I'm excited but kind of feel nervous about it, too. I'm just so used to having my mom and dad around to rely on them for things I couldn't do on my own so now it feels like I'm going into the real world.

Now that I look back at my high school years, I think it went great. I accomplished everything I wanted to do, and even more. I'm happy that God blessed me and led me through it all.

The *Othello* play at the end of the school year went very well. My teacher actually said I should think about becoming an actor. Maybe I'll do it for a little bit.

Sadly, this is my last diary entry.

To finish, I just want to say thank you to SLAM for the opportunity this year and to all of you who took the time out to read every single one of my diaries and learn more about me.

And to my Mississippi State fans, see you this fall!

LEGEND

TACKO FALL Tavares (FL) Liberty Christian, 7-6, C

High school mixtape titles are known for their hyperbole—This Player's Handles are INSANE; So and So is DOMINATING—but Tacko Fall's first, the one that put him on the map, had none. It simply read: Tacko Fall is the Tallest High School Player in the World. It's true: At a whopping 7-6, Fall is damn tall. "I like being tall," he states, proudly. As for the too-low ceilings and too-short beds? "When you get used to it, it just becomes natural."

Fall was "discovered" in Senegal by Ibrahim N'Diaye (former NBAer Mamadou N'Diaye's brother), who brought him to his bball academy. N'Diaye then helped Fall relocate to America, originally Texas, now Tavares, FL, where he lives with a host family and just finished his prep career. "He's not a kid where people are making him play because he's tall," says Tony Atkins, the head coach and principal at Liberty Christian. "He really loves the game."

At first, of course, his on-court style was awkward, but he's improved, and just two and a half years after first picking up a basketball (soccer was his first sport), he's now headed to Central Florida to take his career to the next level. "In five-10 years I plan on having a career in the NBA," he says. "If not, I want to have my engineering degree." —**ADAM FIGMAN**



CRUEL SUMMER

THOMAS BRYANT
Huntington (WV) Prep, 6-10, C

When we spoke in late May, Thomas Bryant was down to his last few days of high school, with exams in English and church history the only things standing between him and vacation. But he wasn't in for much of a break: Before he knew it, in early June, Bryant would be on campus at Indiana, getting a jump on his college career. To hear him tell it, that truncated summer break was no problem at all.

"Having this process over with, knowing where I'll be,"

he said, "I'm feeling good."

You can't blame Bryant for craving some certainty. After transferring from his hometown Bishop Kearney HS to Huntington Prep following his sophomore season, the Rochester, NY, native was one of the last in his class to announce. Growing up not far from Syracuse, the Orange were on his list, as was Kentucky, where the 6-10, 245-pounder and consensus top-20 prospect would've been a logical addition to the

Wildcats. Instead, in April, he announced for the Hoosiers, who will welcome his length, athleticism, motor and range. With Yogi Ferrell sticking around for his senior season and a talented IU squad lacking a big man, Bryant's addition promises big things.

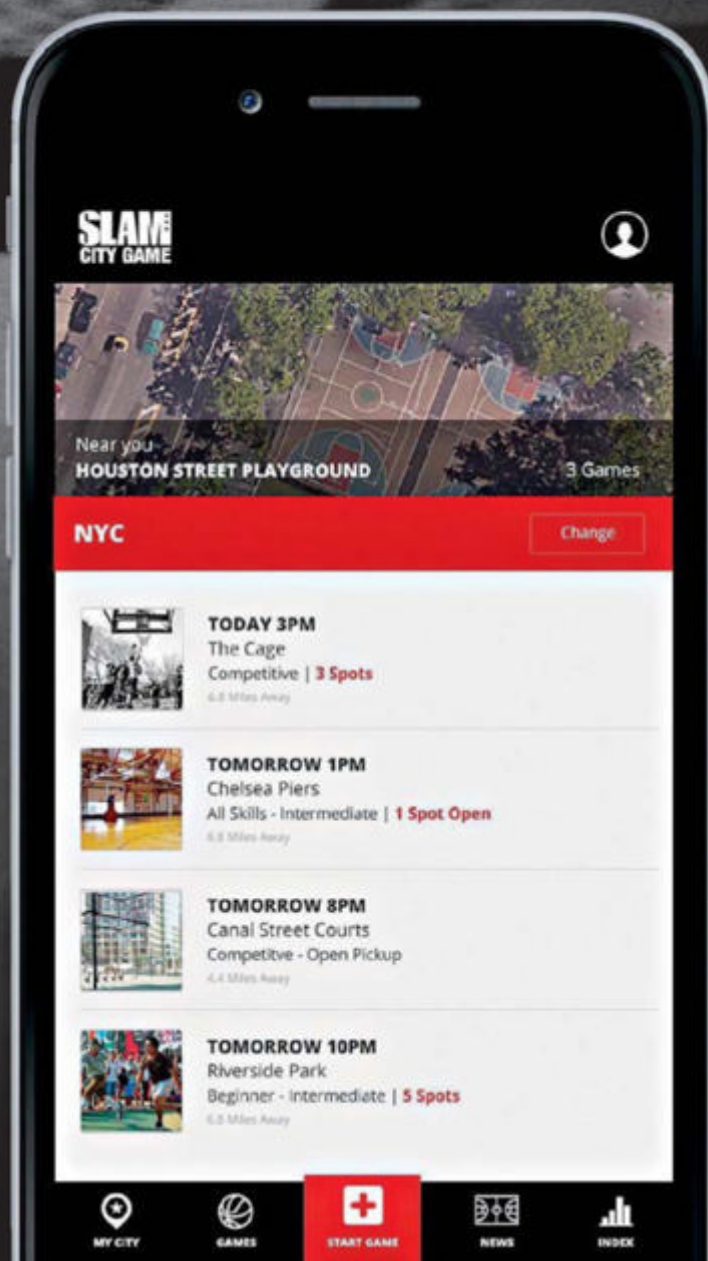
"I'm looking forward to coming in, playing my role, doing whatever they need me to do," he says. "I'm just trying to make a name for myself as someone who's going to compete." —**RYAN JONES**

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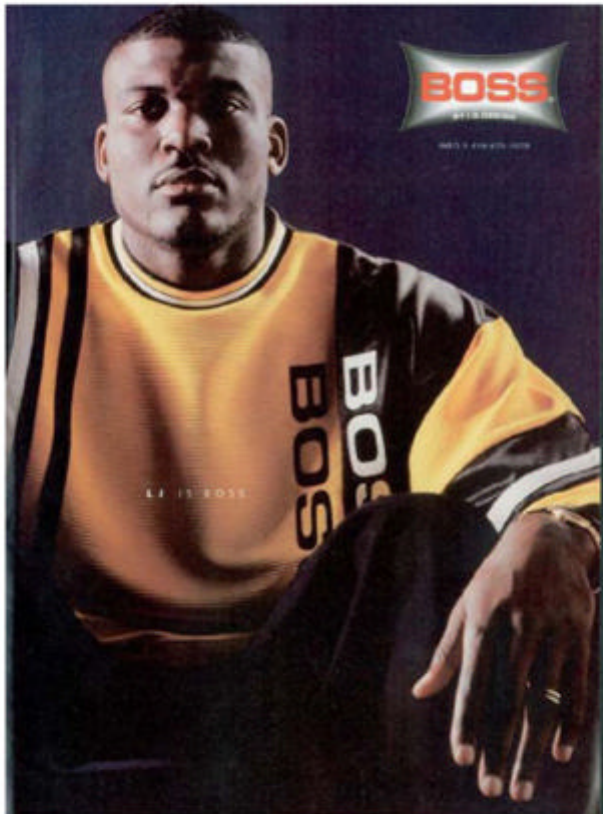
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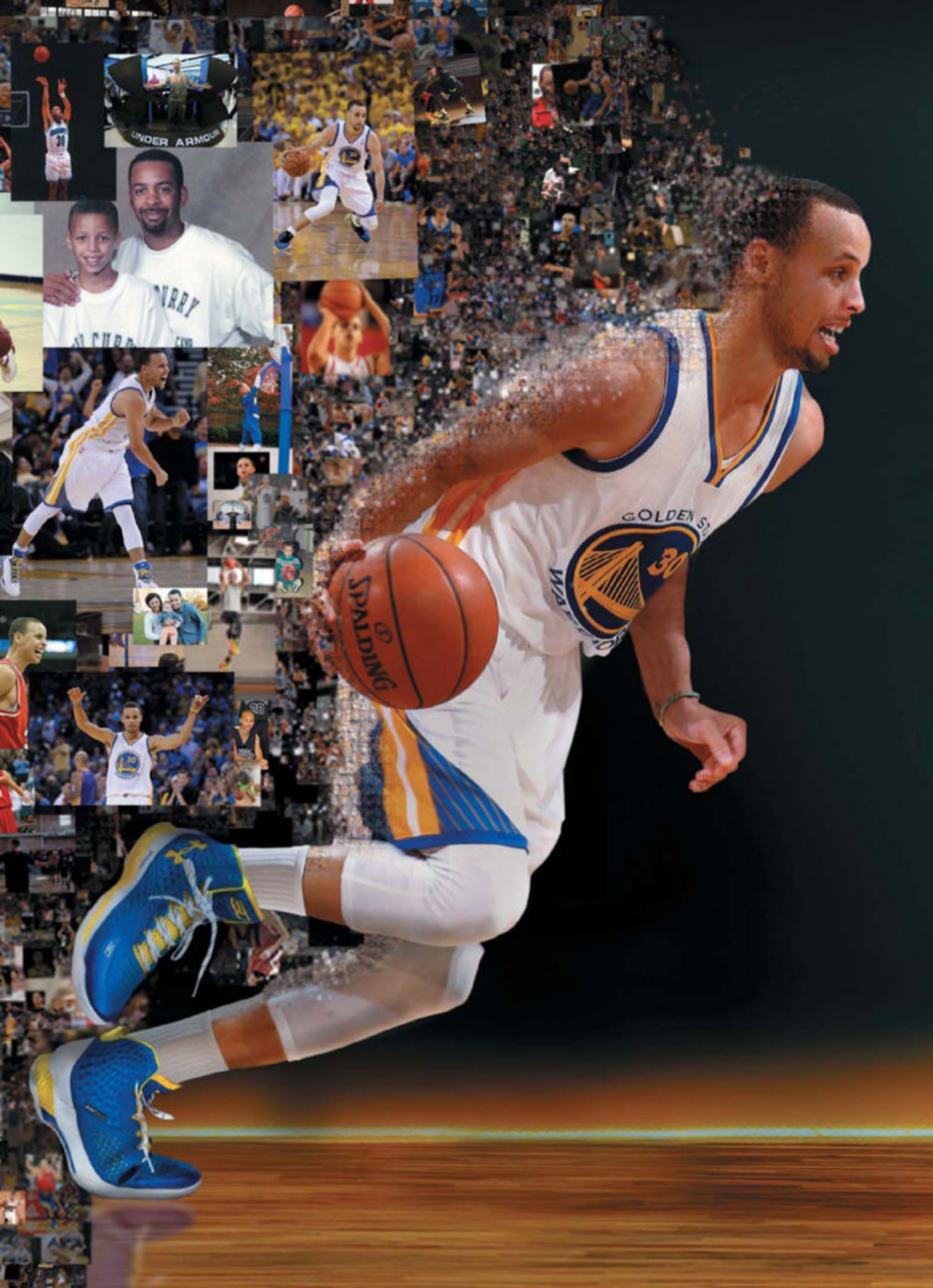


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